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# General Assembly
Nineteenth Special Session

*Official Records*

4th plenary meeting
Tuesday, 24 June 1997, 3 p.m.
New York

*President*: Mr. Razali Ismail . . . . . (Malaysia)

*The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.*

**Agenda item 8** (continued)

**Overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21**

**The President**: The Assembly will first hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Paulin Obame-Nguema, Prime Minister of the Gabonese Republic.

*Mr. Paulin Obame-Nguema, Prime Minister of Gabon, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Mr. Obame-Nguema** (Gabon) (*interpretation from French*): In 1992 the international community turned a new page in its quest for appropriate solutions to the major problems of the day, when the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development and Agenda 21 were adopted during the memorable Conference on Environment and Development.

The Head of State of the Republic of Gabon, His Excellency El Hadj Omar Bongo, who played a very active role at the Rio meeting, would have liked to have been present with us today. However, as you are aware, he remains in Libreville in order to follow very closely the efforts being made to mediate the crises which affect the fraternal peoples of Congo and central Africa. He has therefore authorized me to reiterate before the Assembly his personal commitment to the aims and objectives pursued by our Organization, in particular the implementation of Agenda 21.

I would like, for my part, to reiterate the commitment of the Government and the people of Gabon to promote sustainable development.

In view of the continued deterioration of the environment, what kinds of actions should be urgently undertaken in order to spare present and future generations the consequences of air pollution, the greenhouse effect and the degradation of the ozone layer? Are we sufficiently resolved that the much-heralded advances already made in socioeconomic fields and in environmental protection become firmly rooted? At this time of taking stock, what have we undertaken concretely in order to make a reality of the dual consensus reached in Rio?

This is a consensus on the state of a world which is gradually deteriorating because it is faced with an exacerbation of poverty and the constant deterioration of ecosystems.

We have also reached consensus on the kinds of steps needed to reverse the unacceptable and inhuman trend towards marginalization that is the product of unfair international economic relations.

In short, there is consensus on the need for urgent, joint action to put an end to denial and to the destruction of the environment we live in.

I have taken the liberty of thinking out loud, not so much to provide the answers we are all considering, but

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rather to reiterate Gabon's faith in what continue to be valid remedies unanimously accepted by our Governments five years ago in Rio de Janeiro.

My country remains convinced that the establishment of a new world partnership is the only way to promote the creation of a better world.

Undoubtedly, there are certain requirements for this new partnership in terms of clear respect for the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities" between developed and developing countries.

As we see it, this is the basis for and the driving force behind any process leading to sustainable development.

On the eve of the twenty-first century, we must resolutely choose sustainable development today in order to give the future a chance. Convinced of this truth, my country is getting down to the task of modernizing the regulatory framework of its production systems to adapt them to the ecological requirements laid down at Rio.

To date, Gabon has acceded to the conventions that emerged from the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. The forest, mining and petroleum codes have been revised to take account of the restrictions included in standards for environmental protection. Our planning strategy, which includes the National Plan of Action for the Environment and the National Plan of Action for Forests, will soon be operational.

As a country noteworthy for its forests, Gabon is trying to manage them rationally. It has thus been devoting itself to respecting and implementing the Rio Declaration, which includes principles that are authoritative though not legally binding, in order to arrive at global consensus on the management, conservation and ecologically viable use of all types of forests.

In this context, we intend now to continue our efforts to maintain the necessary balance that should always be struck between the use of these important resources, our forests, and the preservation of the ecosystem, our common heritage.

Gabon believes that the establishment of an intergovernmental forum to deal with the matters left in abeyance in the framework of the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests, particularly those relating to financial resources, technology transfer and trade in forest products, will make it possible to reach consensus on the sustainable management of all kinds of forests.

The imposition of too many conditions on the cooperation that is essential for protecting the environment could adversely affect the results we are counting on.

It is therefore worth stressing the validity of genuine solidarity and real international cooperation to support, strengthen and supplement initiatives taken at the national level by developing countries.

I would like to recall these comments made at Rio, which are still relevant:

> "Development will not be able to be ... accelerated if developing countries are paralysed by external debt, if their development capital is inadequate, if obstacles stand in the way of their market access and if basic commodity prices and the terms of trade of developing countries remain depressed".

Just after the Denver Summit has ended, we hope that the commitments to further sustainable development made by the group of States that met there will be fully respected.

We must recognize that the stakes go far beyond purely economic matters, since poverty, wherever it persists, creates disorder that can threaten international peace and security to the detriment of all genuinely sustainable development.

Just consider the destructive effect of armed conflict on the environment even long after the fighting has ended.

It is no longer enough to say that human beings should be at the centre of all development activities. We need to increase our commitment to coordinating our collective activities and put all our energy into the implementation of the principles, recommendations and decisions adopted at Rio. However, it will be difficult to reach this goal if resources earmarked to finance development continue to decrease so drastically.

The role of the United Nations system, and mainly of the Bretton Woods institutions, is of paramount importance to this end.

Furthermore, we must do all we can to strengthen the capacity for action of the Commission on Sustainable Development and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

More specifically with regard to UNEP, urgent measures should be taken to stop its budgetary resources from being constantly reduced. Without money to do its work, that institution will no longer be able to carry out the tasks we have entrusted to it in the area of environmental protection.

The judicious choice we have to make today is therefore to hold firmly to the commitments entered into in 1992 at Rio so that Agenda 21 can finally become a reality.

We see Agenda 21 as the only viable alternative for humankind. Its full implementation requires renewed vigour and political will.

**The President**: I thank the Prime Minister of the Gabonese Republic for his statement.

*Mr. Paulin Obame Nguema, Prime Minister of the Gabonese Republic, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The President**: The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Adrien Houngbedji, Prime Minister of the Republic of Benin.

*Mr. Adrien Houngbedji, Prime Minister of the Republic of Benin, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Mr. Houngbedji** (Benin) (*interpretation from French*): The historic United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992 raised humankind's awareness of issues surrounding sustainable development.

You, Mr. President, were among those who forged this success. I therefore have no doubt that our work will be guided most ably and that we will see positive results.

At this point, when we have to look back over the implementation of Agenda 21 and at the same time agree on priority actions for the next five years, it is gratifying to note that the concept of sustainable development is becoming an integral part of our thinking and behaviour.

This augurs well and bears witness to a clear resolve on the part of present generations to leave to posterity a peaceful and safe world.

In August 1993, Benin held a National Seminar on a strategy for the follow-up and implementation of the results of the Rio Conference. The recommendations and conclusions of the Seminar are being steadily implemented and remain at the heart of our concerns.

In this context, Benin moved on to develop and adopt, on 22 January 1997, its National Agenda 21.

We have established a National Commission on Sustainable Development, which is responsible for setting general policy guidelines and following up and assessing implementation of the National Agenda 21. In the same spirit we established the Benin Centre for Sustainable Development and the Benin Agency for the Environment.

Furthermore, on 21 March 1994, Benin and the Netherlands reached an agreement on sustainable development, an innovative experiment that has already led to the financing and implementation of many projects.

At the international legal level, Benin is pleased to have ratified the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa. As regards the latter Convention, my country established a National Committee to Combat Desertification and has launched the process of drafting a national programme of action.

I should like to emphasize the fact that concerted action by the international community is necessary in order to combat desertification successfully and to mitigate the effects of drought. One manifestation of this shared determination should be the modalities for the establishment and functioning of the global mechanism. Benin believes that the International Fund for Agricultural Development would be an appropriate host for the global mechanism in the framework of co-management with all the interested institutions, such as the United Nations Development Programme and the World Bank.

The attainment of the objective of sustainable development undeniably requires the elimination of poverty, particularly in the developing countries. To that end, Benin has created an agency for the management of the social dimension of development and, in July 1996, adopted its National Employment Programme.

Over the next five years, and in the framework of the government programme of action, Benin pledges to redouble its efforts and to participate actively in all initiatives aimed, *inter alia*, at the elimination of poverty and the protection of vulnerable and marginalized groups, above all women and children; the campaign against desertification and the mitigation of the effects of drought; the management of water resources, particularly those of fresh water; the protection and development of coastal regions threatened by marine erosion; and the promotion of energy to serve development and of new and renewable sources of energy. These priority spheres of action fall entirely within the framework of the objectives and recommendations of the final document and of the political declaration of this special session of the General Assembly.

We are aware that the financing of development is primarily the responsible of countries themselves. Nonetheless, we remain convinced that the international community, in particular its most developed members, must do their share by respecting, in a spirit of solidarity and cooperation, the commitments undertaken at summits and conferences held by the United Nations since the Rio Conference.

It is fitting to welcome and commend here the efforts of Benin's development partners, who have tirelessly lent us their support and assistance towards the gradual achievement of sustainable development. We also wish to express appreciation for the efforts of those countries that have reached or exceeded the agreed target of 0.7 per cent of gross national product for official development assistance.

If we are to attain sustainable development on planet Earth, the home of humankind, only a global, integrated and long-term vision will allow us to consider and carefully assess the different options before us and to take, as of today, the decisions that are necessary at the national and international levels. We have no right to make mistakes, much less to fail in the implementation of our decisions, if we are to provide our descendants with a radiant future for the well-being of all humanity.

**The President:** I thank the Prime Minister of the Republic of Benin for his statement.

*Mr. Adrien Houngbedji, Prime Minister of the Republic of Benin, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The President:** The Assembly will now here a statement by His Excellency Mr. Enrique Borgo-Bustamante, Vice-President of the Republic of El Salvador.

*Mr. Enrique Borgo-Bustamante, Vice-President of the Republic of El Salvador, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Mr. Borgo-Bustamante** (El Salvador) (*interpretation from Spanish*): It is my pleasure to convey to you, Sir, and to all the delegations of Member States the cordial greetings of the people and Government of El Salvador, as well as our hope that, under your guidance, this Assembly will lead the way in the struggle for sustainable development.

Five years have elapsed since we signed the historic Rio Declaration and agreed to a series of commitments, contained in Agenda 21, on economic, social and environmental development. Those same five years have elapsed since the signing of the Peace Accords in Chapultepec, Mexico, that put an end to the devastating military conflict that afflicted El Salvador for over 10 years. That conflict, with its sequel of death and material destruction and the ensuing reversals to our systems of education, health and basic services, dragged living conditions to levels below those of 1978.

Military activity has been replaced by political activity, creating space for democracy in which dialogue and the search for consensus prevail, with the participation of the Government and of civil society.

Sustainable development is a principal issue on the global agenda. Central America, including El Salvador, affirmed this clearly in 1994 through the establishment by the Presidents of the region of the Central American Alliance for Sustainable Development.

El Salvador has accepted the challenge of sustainable development and my Government has pledged to support the establishment of appropriate forums for discussion and for the attainment of consensus on policy on this subject. This support took shape in the recent creation of the National Council for Sustainable Development, which I have the responsibility to lead.

In accordance with the principles of representation, multisectoral participation and equity, and in light of the recommendations of the Rio + 5 meeting and of the successful experiences of other countries, a joint council has been planned. It will be composed of 29 members, of whom 14 will be drawn from the Government — 10 of

them ministers — and 15 from the business, labour and academic spheres; local authorities; non-governmental organizations from the economic, social and environmental spheres; congressional representatives; and three independent members.

The structure of the National Council for Sustainable Development reflects the strengthening of participatory democracy. Tangible evidence of this is civil society's response to our call for the election of candidates to councils, with 100 per cent participation of the non-governmental organizations invited.

The establishment of the Ministry for the Environment and Natural Resources was another decisive and vital step taken by my Government.

In the social sphere, one of the most relevant actions in the struggle against poverty has been the establishment of a fund for social investment for local development, in which communities participate, giving priority to activities that generate productive employment.

We are aware that quality of life can improve only if the population is healthy and educated, since this would allow access to greater opportunities for betterment and employment, thus contributing to reducing poverty. For this reason, a "healthy schools" programme has been established and educational reform effected that aims at increasing the quality, scope and efficiency of educational services. Another programme, "Education with the Participation of the Community", was established with the participation of parents and other authorities. This programme was awarded a prize by the World Bank just a few months ago.

With the support of the United Nations, the Government of El Salvador is promoting a programme of sustainable human development with the objective of strengthening local capacities for management at the departmental, micro-regional and municipal levels.

El Salvador has displayed a high degree of compliance with the commitments undertaken at the Earth Summit by ratifying the Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and also by acceding to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa, which is now before Congress for ratification. El Salvador has promoted and ratified a number of regional agreements, promulgated national laws and created institutional mechanisms for their implementation.

Our Government is prepared, with the support of all sectors, to develop a plan of action for sustainable development that will allow us to greet the new century with a clear vision of what we can do today to bequeath a better life to future generations.

We believe that the cornerstone of sustainable development is the education and training of all sectors in order to promote economic and social development without damaging the environment. Problems that are aggravated by the small size of our territory and by population density require measures that are aimed at promoting economic growth without damaging the quality of the environment and the natural heritage of our country. In the past five years, we have made significant progress in the implementation of a development programme that has dealt with many problems. Nonetheless, we are aware that poverty and environmental degradation are our major challenges.

I wish to express our appreciation to all of the nations and international agencies that are supporting us technically and financially in order to reverse the consequences of the conflict that ravaged El Salvador, and we invite the international community to accompany us in our transition towards sustainable development with timely and flexible assistance.

I have already seen the yellow light on the podium, and now it is turning red. May I therefore conclude my statement with a thought.

Yesterday and today I heard many statements by Heads of State or representatives from industrialized countries with the capacity and the will to provide financial assistance. Some of these pledged to allocate 0.7 per cent of their gross national product for official development assistance for the development of the most disadvantaged countries, those of us who have the natural infrastructure to invest for the benefit of the global environment. But something is happening in the course of the channelling process, because assistance is not arriving as expected. We must clear those channels so that my grandchildren, together with the children of His Excellency Tony Blair, and of Their Excellencies Helmut Kohl, José María Aznar or Romani Prodi and others may receive a legacy that is precious to them and to their descendants: an environment that will make it

possible for them to enjoy the quality of life that we take for granted.

**The President:** I thank His Excellency the Vice-President of the Republic of El Salvador for his statement.

*Mr. Enrique Borgo-Bustamante, Vice-President of the Republic of El Salvador, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The President:** The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Samuel Hinds, President of the Republic of Guyana.

*Mr. Samuel Hinds, President of the Republic of Guyana, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**President Hinds:** The review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21 in which we are now engaged at the highest political level offers the opportunity to breathe new life and meaning into the objectives so loftily proclaimed in Rio. It is also a moment in the history of the United Nations that we must seize to ensure that the Organization remains the potent force in international cooperation that was foreseen by its founders.

I am personally pleased to be here for this special session. First, let me convey to you, Sir, and to our sister States in the Organization the warmest greetings of the Government and people of the Caribbean Community. To the distinguished Secretary- General who has taken office not too long ago, I offer our best wishes for a successful term of office.

Rio 1992, like Stockholm 20 years earlier, challenged us to take a holistic approach to development; to seek to better understand the interaction of man and nature; and to accept our shared responsibility for the future of our planet. We followed up Rio with additional commitments in Barbados, Cairo, Copenhagen, Beijing, Istanbul and Rome. We in the Caribbean Community pooled our limited resources and participated in all these conferences because of a fundamental belief that the challenges which confront our planet and our civilization can be effectively addressed only through joint and coordinated action.

Today, five years after Rio, some hard but important questions we must ask ourselves are: Have we reduced the pressure on our environment? Have we reduced poverty? Are we positioned to reduce either?

The Caribbean Community, as a region of small islands and low-lying coastal States, took the position in Rio that a focus on the special vulnerabilities of small island States and the seas that surround them, especially semi-enclosed seas such as the Caribbean Sea, was essential to our understanding of, and likely impact on, global sustainability. We were heartened that Agenda 21 provided the mandate for the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, which was convened in Barbados in May 1994. The Barbados Programme of Action, like Agenda 21, has suffered severely from a failure to commit the resources assessed as necessary for their effective implementation. It is our hope that the period leading up to the review of the Barbados Programme in 1999 will allow the international community to make good on its commitment to support the implementation efforts of small island and low-lying coastal States.

The Commission on Sustainable Development, the Conventions on biodiversity and on climate change and other agencies and instruments have done very well in identifying critical problems facing the natural environment. But the Caribbean Community is concerned that the means of effecting the requisite solutions are far from being sufficiently addressed.

Despite the prevailing challenges, we in the Caribbean have continued our effort to better understand and seek to manage a sea which has a direct impact on some 25 Members of the United Nations and some 15 non-independent countries and territories. We acknowledge the support of a number of bilateral and multilateral agencies and institutions, including the Global Environmental Facility in our effort. We intend to intensify this effort in 1998 — the International Year of the Ocean — and trust that we can count on the international community to assist us not only in making the Caribbean Sea a nuclear-free zone, but also in making it a special area for sustainable management and development.

My own country, Guyana, is a clear example of a small developing State which must face the task of sustainable development against great odds. The year 1992 was doubly significant for Guyana. With the rest of the world, we started implementing Agenda 21. And specifically in our country, we restored democracy and embarked on a course of national reconstruction. Great demands have been placed on our limited resources for satisfying the many needs of our population. Nonetheless,

from the start of the rebuilding process, our Government strongly embraced the principles of Rio.

We have made significant strides in the quest to create a healthy and productive life for our people. But our best efforts are seriously constrained by the difficult international climate, which also limits our ability to put in place many of the measures we consider necessary for the protection of our natural environment.

To demonstrate our commitment to the environment, Guyana in 1989 voluntarily donated almost 1 million acres of its pristine tropical rainforests to the international community for study and experimentation with systems of sustainable management, thus giving birth to the Iwokrama International Rain Forest Programme. This offer was in response to the expectations of the international community. The programme, however, requires external support if it is to be fully implemented.

The main constraint has been the inability of the international community to mobilize the necessary financial resources. A rental charge of $10 per acre per year would have yielded $10 million: more than the projected annual budget. Is less than three cents per acre per day an unreasonable investment by the international community to learn and develop models for the sustainable development of the lungs of our planet? I invite all interested Member States to become partners with us in this most important project.

I wish to join in observing that today, whilst the percentage of the poor may be decreasing, there are more people in the world who live in poverty than there were five years ago, with women, children and indigenous people especially disadvantaged. We have not addressed in any fundamental way the unprecedented levels of relative and absolute poverty in a world of economic growth. Perhaps we are too concerned to find ways to maintain economic growth and the lifestyles of the affluent.

Globalization of the world economy is proceeding without sufficient safeguards for small developing economies. In this regard, we continue to press the need for favourable consideration of regional development funds and for non-reciprocal trading arrangements for such economies.

Concomitant with the globalization of the world economy is a globalization of expectations and aspirations. Our peoples, who see daily through the media of the cinema and television how the developed countries live, have increased expectations of improved conditions. Even in the most remote parts of Guyana, the standards of living aspired to by our indigenous peoples are similar to those desired by all peoples. There must be realistic opportunities for people in developing countries in the not-too-distant future to enjoy living standards similar to those of the developed countries.

My predecessor, the late President Cheddi Jagan, challenged the international community on many occasions to strive for a new global human order, a development paradigm which would seek simultaneously to achieve optimal economic growth, social equity, poverty reduction and protection of the environment: a development model rooted in a partnership that seeks a better balance within and among States. We renew this challenge to the Assembly so that together we may fulfil the promises of Agenda 21 and thus ensure the development of our peoples.

**The President:** I thank His Excellency the President of the Republic of Guyana for his statement.

*Mr. Samuel Hinds, President of the Republic of Guyana, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The President:** The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Carlos Lemos-Simmonds, Vice-President of the Republic of Colombia.

*Mr. Carlos Lemos-Simmonds, Vice-President of the Republic of Colombia, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Mr. Lemos-Simmonds** (Colombia) (*interpretation from Spanish*): It is an honour for me, on behalf of Colombia and its President, to address this special session of the General Assembly, which has been convened to reflect on what has already been achieved and the problems still to be tackled in connection with the implementation of Agenda 21. This session provides an exceptional opportunity to inject fresh impetus into the work of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, which set up a new global alliance for development. It should also be an occasion to draw up recommendations that could strengthen the commitments that were freely entered into by the international community.

Agenda 21 establishes certain principles and responsibilities which, although not legally binding, set out guidelines and political responsibilities which should be reflected in the activities of the international

community, most particularly those of the developed countries.

Noting that the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities is not being fully complied with, developing countries like my own legitimately continue to express their concern on this issue. The industrialized countries have failed to adopt the expected measures and policies to address the harmful environmental effects of their unsustainable consumption and production patterns. They have also failed to meet other commitments, including those regarding the mobilization of resources for development.

The eradication of poverty remains the main priority for developing countries, where more than 1.2 billion people live in inhuman conditions and have no access to basic health services, adequate housing, food or education. Conflict, unemployment, social upheaval, massive migration and political instability are constantly generated by exclusion, social discrimination, backwardness and underdevelopment. It is therefore becoming increasingly urgent to introduce social, economic and environmental policies in keeping with the concept of sustainable development.

Unfortunately, in this regard the balance sheet of the first five years of Agenda 21 has been negative. Poverty has escalated; economic and technological power is increasingly concentrated in a few countries and in the hands of a few individuals; the environment has continued to deteriorate; and the gap between developed and developing nations, far from narrowing, has widened substantially.

We, the developing countries, have been willing to pay the price for adopting models of sustainable development. We have recognized that our use of natural resources cannot be unlimited and that the needs of future generations must be considered. However, individual countries cannot be held accountable for the conservation of the environment. Such an approach is as ineffective as it is unfair. Because the problems relating to environment and development are global in nature, they require a global response that will introduce specific measures and demand commitments to bring about tangible benefits for the developing countries.

Such a commitment must be comprehensive and must address the most critical development issues. As stipulated in Agenda 21, it is imperative for the developed countries to mobilize new and additional financial resources for the developing countries. Moreover, environmentally sound technologies must be transferred on preferential terms and at a reasonable cost. In the light of the expectations created by the Earth Summit, these two areas probably constitute the main sources of frustration.

Colombia is among the countries that have advanced the most in the area of sustainable development. Because 10 per cent of the world's biological diversity is to be found in our country, we have adopted a national policy that aims at promoting conservation, awareness and sustainable use of these resources. In the past five years, in line with this policy, Colombia has set up a regulatory and institutional framework, ranging from the establishment of the Ministry for the Environment to the creation of an environmental network enabling the authorities and the community to take part in the national and local decision-making process relating to the environment.

Forests cover 46 per cent of continental Colombian territory, and 17 per cent of these have been designated as forest conservation areas. In this regard, we commend initiatives for nations to promise that a certain proportion of their wooded areas will be designated as protected forest conservation areas.

Aware of the importance of forests, Colombia accepted the honour of chairing the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests. We are convinced that the recommendations of this Panel must be put into practice before we focus our efforts on the negotiation of new multilateral instruments. On the other hand, effective compensation for global services for forests must be ensured for countries that provide those services.

Like other developing countries, Colombia believes that our efforts cannot be made in isolation. In addition to yielding transfers of technology and financial resources, international cooperation must foster the implementation of national plans for development. Colombia acknowledges the progress achieved at the institutional level during recent United Nations conferences. The Commission on Sustainable Development is an example of that, as are the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on desertification and drought. However, we must not try to weaken the United Nations Environment Programme or merge it with other United Nations programmes. On the contrary, we believe that this programme should be strengthened,

regardless of any adjustments that may be required for its increased efficiency.

Some countries regard trade as the only means for developing nations to obtain the inflow of resources required for investment in sustainable development. We do not question the usefulness of international trade as an important factor for economic growth. However, it is clear that opening up trade is complementary to, not a substitute for, official cooperation. The market, however open and broad it may be, does not replace the political will and commitment required to comply with the principles set out in the Rio Declaration and the obligations agreed to in Agenda 21.

The liberalization of trade and economic globalization provide challenges and opportunities for the expansion of economic links, but they do not guarantee the redistribution of resources for development. It is not yet clear how developing countries can obtain access under fair terms to the benefits of globalization.

Nor is it obvious what mechanisms are required to foster mutual support between trade and the environment without the application of unilateral measures and the introduction of new conditions that may thwart the objectives agreed upon at the Earth Summit.

Such objectives will be feasible only if developing countries are soon provided with relief for the burden of their foreign debt. The implementation of the initiatives adopted by the multilateral institutions must be expedited so as to bring both the amount and servicing of debt down to a sustainable level.

Private capital flows should be regarded neither as the only alternative nor as a panacea to achieve the mobilization of resources required by Agenda 21. It was Governments that undertook the commitments of Agenda 21, especially the commitment to provide resources for developing countries. It is therefore Governments that must, through the revitalization of international cooperation, fulfil the primary responsibility for the implementation of the agreed environmental and developmental programmes.

Sustainable development at a global level poses enormous challenges. The only way to ensure that future generations will enjoy a decent standard of living is to strengthen the links of global partnership for development. Our country is optimistic and regards this gathering as an opportunity to redress the failings that we have outlined. I am referring in particular to the recent appeal by the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries at its ministerial meeting in New Delhi for countries to change their patterns of consumption and production, to facilitate a suitable level of transfers of resources and technology and at the same time to give priority to the eradication of poverty in developing countries. It is therefore up to us to reassert our political will so as to channel our efforts towards achieving sustainable development in the next millennium.

**The President:** I thank the Vice-President of the Republic of Colombia for his statement.

*Mr. Carlos Lemos-Simmonds, Vice-President of the Republic of Colombia, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The President:** The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Goh Chok Tong, Prime Minister of the Republic of Singapore.

*Mr. Goh Chok Tong, Prime Minister of the Republic of Singapore, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Mr. Goh** (Singapore): Since the Rio Summit, there has been considerable progress in the codification of international environmental law in many areas, including climate change, desertification and biological diversity. There is also deeper awareness that we must work together to meet the global problems that affect all of us.

But recognizing the problems does not guarantee their solution. The "grand bargain" struck at Rio may unravel. Many industrialized countries are today struggling to restructure their own economies and cope with slow growth and high unemployment. Global environmental problems are remote to many of their ordinary citizens, who are more concerned with perceived threats to their own standard of living. The political will to provide the assistance that developing countries urgently need to implement Agenda 21 is weakening. Commitments made at Rio have not been fulfilled.

Even when a far-sighted vision exists, it has often proved difficult to forge a clear consensus for action. For example, Vice-President Al Gore took the lead to push for the greening of American foreign policy, which could generate new international momentum. But the Senate also voted recently to deny United States funding for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate

Change. This illustrates the complexities faced not just by the United States, but also by other countries in the North.

The South feels, correctly, that sacrificing growth will only perpetuate injustice. Developing countries deem it unreasonable that they are required to address long-term environmental problems at the expense of immediate needs. It is unfair to expect the poor to bear the main costs of reducing global environmental risks, especially when most of those risks are attributable to past actions by today's affluent countries. Without adequate funding, sustainable development is only a slogan. The concept has also become entangled with broader debates over issues that are not directly relevant to the protection of the environment. This has fuelled suspicion that environmental issues are now being used by the North as disguised protectionism to keep developing countries down.

Singapore is between the developed and the developing worlds. We define our international identity as a member of the Group of 77 and of the Non-Aligned Movement. Our economy today has relatively sophisticated service and industrial sectors. But we are more vulnerable than most to unfavourable external developments. We watch the post-Rio re-emergence of North-South divisions over the environment with deep and growing concern.

Environmental interdependence is a stark and inescapable reality. We have no illusions about the necessity for a concerted and continuing international effort. Singapore played an active role in forging a North-South consensus before and during the Rio Summit. But we are realistic in understanding that those circumstances were unique. What a small country can do alone after Rio is insignificant.

Only the leadership of a major global economy can renew and reinvigorate the global compact. So when Chancellor Helmut Kohl invited Singapore to join Germany, South Africa and Brazil in launching a new initiative at this special session, I did not hesitate. Germany faces the same immediate challenges as other developed economies. But Chancellor Kohl has the conviction and courage to act upon a larger vision. He deserves support. It is in our interest to give him support.

We are four countries from four different continents, at different levels of development, facing different environmental problems. Our modest initiative addresses the priorities of both North and South. We hope that our ability to work together can catalyse broader international action and a continuing North-South partnership. In this effort, the United Nations Environment Programme's central role must continue.

Singapore, a small, densely populated urbanized island, takes the environment seriously. Otherwise our country would not be liveable. We aim to make our quality of living even better. Our experiences may not be directly transferable to other developing countries, but our success in achieving high standards of environmental protection in an urban setting may be of interest to some.

The new proposals that we launched yesterday with our partners for a "Decade for the Sustainable Production and Use of Energy", for a "Conference on Sustainable Urban Development", and for "Environmentally Acceptable Transport", concern areas to which Singapore pays great attention. No country has all the answers. Singapore learns all the time from others, from their successes and mistakes. Cooperation is necessary in solving the global problems of sustainable development.

It is in this spirit that I now announce the Singapore Technical Assistance Programme for Sustainable Development for developing countries. This is a modest programme aimed at sharing our experience with others from the developing world. It focuses on the training of officials in areas such as urban planning, the management of parks and transportation. We hope this Programme will help developing countries implement some aspects of Agenda 21.

What a country with a population of three million can do globally is only a drop in the ocean, but we offer the Singapore Technical Assistance Programme on Sustainable Development as a tangible token of our seriousness to promote greater cooperation in sustainable development. We hope that it will encourage the larger and more prosperous countries from the North to fulfil their commitments and join us in what must be a global endeavour.

**The President**: I thank the Prime Minister of the Republic of Singapore for his statement.

*Mr. Goh Chok Tong, Prime Minister of the Republic of Singapore, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The President**: The Assembly will now hear a statement from His Excellency Mr. Mart Siimann, Prime Minister of the Republic of Estonia.

*Mr. Mart Siimann, Prime Minister of the Republic of Estonia, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Mr. Siimann** (Estonia): I would like to open my remarks with the observation that Estonia has made significant social and economic progress since the 1992 Rio de Janeiro United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). In five years, we have largely completed the difficult transition from a typical centrally planned economy to one of the world's most liberal market economies.

*Mr. Martínez Blanco (Honduras), Vice-President, took the Chair.*

This rapid and radical reform has not come without human cost, and it continues to present a challenge to Estonian society. There was, however, no alternative. The command economy imposed by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics had reached a crisis point and the so-called softer redevelopment options would only have led to further instability. On the positive side, this difficult transition period did allow Estonia to implement the principles of sustainable development at both the local and national level during the post-UNCED period.

Looking at the different elements of Agenda 21 sustainable development programme adopted at the Rio Summit, the environmental aspects have been the easiest to implement. In the economic sector changes have occurred at a slower pace, as they have been dependent on the privatization process and on the availability of investment capital. The most difficult and complicated element has been the social agenda, since it requires a fully stabilized economy. In this respect, our transition period has not yet ended.

It will not be possible to implement the principles of the sustainable development programme without international cooperation. Since the Rio Earth Summit, Estonia has joined a number of international organizations dealing with sustainable development and the environment, and it has ratified such key documents as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer, along with the associated Montreal Protocol.

Furthermore, Estonia places great importance on the preparation and adoption of the United Nations convention on forests. Estonia shares the world-wide concern for the deterioration of the global environment. However, given our limited resources, we attach the highest priority to taking care of our responsibilities under the conventions already ratified rather than to signing as many international agreements as possible.

As an associate member of the European Union, Estonia will ensure that its position on the environment and on sustainable development is in harmony with that of the European Union. Furthermore, Estonia is an active participant in regional forums, such as Environment for Europe, that address environmentally sensitive development and in the work of related organizations and conventions.

In addition to pursuing these goals at the global and regional level, Estonia has also been active at the subregional level, notably in the Council of the Baltic Sea States. An essential element in this process was the May 1996 Prime Ministers meeting in Visby, Sweden, during which an action plan was adopted embracing the principles of sustainable development. The Visby conference led to the October meeting between the environment ministers of the Baltic Sea States in Saltsjöbaden, Sweden, at which priorities were established for the implementation of Agenda 21 in the Baltic Sea area. These include steps to broaden international cooperation in the fields of energy, agriculture, fishing, forestry, industry, tourism and transport.

The Baltic region's Agenda 21 programme should be able to identify specific sustainable development goals, assess the progress made towards those goals and indicate areas where improvement is necessary. Emphasis should be placed on development strategies for key economic sectors and on evaluating their economic and political impact. The final result should be a sustainable development strategy for the Baltic region that identifies goals, means and methods, along with timetables and financing proposals.

It can be stated as a matter of fact that since the 1992 Rio Conference, Estonia has implemented the Agenda 21 principles of sustainable development in its domestic policy. A special law on sustainable development has been adopted by Parliament. A national Commission on Sustainable Development has been established, headed by the Prime Minister, in order to coordinate regional, national and local initiatives. In cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme and with its financial assistance, a national Agenda 21 programme is being prepared. This document

will act as a charter for the national Commission. On the local level, there is a growing appreciation of the principles of sustainable development, and work has started on the first local Agenda 21 initiatives.

Estonia also places great importance on the activities of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development, the United Nations Environment Programme and the Global Environment Facility. Estonia's experience has coupled a prudent fiscal policy with environmental awareness, and in so doing, we hope that other nations will follow.

**The Acting President** (*interpretation from Spanish*): I thank the Prime Minister of the Republic of Estonia for his statement.

*Mr. Mart Siimann, Prime Minister of the Republic of Estonia, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The Acting President** (*interpretation from Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Sir Cuthbert Sebastian, Governor-General of Saint Kitts and Nevis.

*Sir Cuthbert Sebastian, Governor-General of Saint Kitts and Nevis, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Governor-General Sir Cuthbert Sebastian**: We have made significant strides during the last five years as we strive to add further substance to the issue in hand in the spirit and letter of resolution 44/228, the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, and Agenda 21. This special session is an important occasion, and we must use it as a practical opportunity to discuss the progress and failures encountered in our attempt to implement Agenda 21.

The phenomenon of sustainable development transcends the usual idle rhetoric. We are here to consolidate our collective efforts and to concentrate on developing a more pragmatic and mutually beneficial relationship so that in the years ahead we are better able to tackle the problems we have already identified at previous conferences and at the national level.

The Rio Conference and Agenda 21 are significant milestones on a long and arduous path towards sustainable development. This special session is indeed another such milestone as we continue this crucial journey. The road ahead may seem laden with obstacles and fraught with difficulties, but we cannot fail to proceed; we cannot abandon our responsibility to advance the process of sustainable human development. Additionally, although progress has been slow and elusive in some areas, we cannot become discouraged.

The results of previous conferences are obvious reminders of the power of collective strategizing and the central role for the United Nations in wedding amicably the interests of its Members. We are now witnessing greater responsibility towards the environment, improved awareness and heightened attention to sustainable development.

For my delegation, Agenda 21, its review and its appraisal are about real change: change that means the integration of economics and the environment, trade and the environment; change that reflects new consumption and production patterns; change that reflects a closer monitoring of environmental performance; change that encourages greater cooperation in development; change that suggests pragmatic and close scrutiny of sectoral issues such as energy, transport, toxic chemicals, the hazards of nuclear energy and its transshipment, urbanization, biotechnology and education.

The developing world needs contributions and a commitment from the developed world, integrated into a broad policy of international cooperation to address the problems which inhibit real progress. We must devise innovative strategies that encourage the flow of resources to the South to accelerate sustainable development in poorer countries.

Sustainable development demands that we attack the root causes of poverty and commit ourselves to its eradication. The developing world requires a reinvigorated commitment to education and a cohesive approach to agriculture and poverty. We must continue to work to promote the sustainable development of the human person.

The alleviation of poverty in any given society is a long-term investment in a civil and productive society. It contributes to sustainable peace, justice and the progress of humankind. By eradicating poverty, we empower our people better to protect and improve their health. We enable them to afford improved housing and a richer quality of life.

Poor countries lacking in natural resources, with our open economies, are especially vulnerable to the dictates of natural disasters and the volatile forces of globalization

and trade liberalization. Our predicament is made more burdensome by the unfortunate risks posed in our ecosystems and lifestyles by hazardous nuclear wastes introduced surreptitiously into our region while being transshipped.

Agenda 21 is also about partnership, transparency and real cooperation. The environmentally sound management of biotechnology, the conservation and protection of biological diversity, the protection of our coastal areas and seas and the rational uses and exploitation of marine resources must be encouraged.

We cannot and will not achieve sound economic, social and environmental development without the financial, technical and technological support of those countries able to lend such assistance. This appeal is even more urgent in the light of the trends of declining foreign aid and foreign investment.

Finally, it is urgent that we work towards ensuring financial support for national mechanisms established to ensure the implementation of Agenda 21. I urge countries to work together to ensure the implementation of the main goals of the Barbados Programme of Action. We need to work together not because it is charitable or fashionable so to do, but because of our collective human and moral responsibility. If we commit to working together in a sustainable way, we commit to sustaining real development for tomorrow's generations.

**The Acting President** (*interpretation from Spanish*): I thank the Governor-General of Saint Kitts and Nevis for his statement.

*Sir Cuthbert Sebastian, Governor-General of Saint Kitts and Nevis, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The Acting President** (*interpretation from Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency The Honourable Gert Hanekom, Minister of the Environment and Tourism of Namibia.

*The Honourable Gert Hanekom, Minister of the Environment and Tourism of Namibia, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Mr. Hanekom** (Namibia): The international community committed itself to the implementation of Agenda 21 in 1992, which set the scene for a mutually beneficial partnership between socio-economic development and environmental protection. We call this partnership sustainable development.

The synergy that this partnership was meant to bring to bear on the future quality of life of people throughout the world gave new hope for the future of this planet. In reality, we committed our countries to a global reform — a new way of doing business, a new way of planning, a new way of thinking about the future, about ourselves and our natural resources, and a new way of thinking about one another as people with a common global heritage.

Global reform does not take place overnight. I share the frustration at the slow rate of implementation of sustainable development. Yet I also experience the excitement of seeing new thinking on sustainability entering into the sectors of agriculture, industry, trade, tourism, transport and energy. It is equally invigorating to see environmental groups and institutions understanding and accepting the indispensable interconnection between development and environmental protection. The recent support for Namibia, Botswana and Zimbabwe on their programmes of sustainable use of elephants attests to this fact.

Sustainable development cannot be measured through the attainment of a certain gross national product or per capita income. Development can only be sustained when our lifestyles are sustainable and the quality of life of all people is good. Poor countries with high levels of poverty and associated social underdevelopment are obviously not the role models we want. Rich countries with unsustainable production and consumption patterns, impoverished biodiversity and high pollution levels are also inappropriate role models. Yet, sadly, these highly consumptive lifestyles are often what poor nations aspire towards.

In truth, we have no good role models, only challenges, ideas, inspirations and some institutions in place at the international, regional and local levels that help us to meet, focus our thinking and share ideas for the common good of mankind.

Namibia's sustainable development priorities are to eradicate poverty and halt environmental degradation. These objectives are inextricably linked. One cannot be achieved without the other. Namibia's environment and development programmes are implemented in support of these priorities and Namibia's commitment to

international and regional environment and development conventions are also directly linked to these objectives.

To us, frame conditions for sustainable development include peace, security, democracy, good governance and respect for human rights. Human rights encompass rights to a clean, healthy and productive environment and rights to knowledge and information.

The legacy of Namibia's history is still apparent in many socio-economic indicators of national welfare. About 5 per cent of the population earn 70 per cent of the income, while over half the population shares less than 5 per cent. This unacceptable disparity is similarly reflected in housing standards, education and health care, with remote rural areas being particularly disadvantaged. It is true that these disparities are also to be found between different countries and regions of the world.

To retain the frame conditions for sustainable development of peace, security and democracy in Namibia, it is essential that we aggressively promote economic growth, job creation, human resource development and equity. It is therefore essential that, at the international level, we create a supportive and enabling environment to complement the national efforts of developing countries.

Namibia is committed to promoting and supporting sustainable development at three levels. The first involves local action and local empowerment; the second involves national and government action to create an enabling environment; and the third is international action. I will address only the last level on international action.

Eco-efficiency, access to clean and environmentally friendly technology and actions to address unsustainable consumption and production patterns must be adopted as international priorities. International trade practice must support sound environmental management, not undermine it, particularly where subsidies are involved. And the commitments made at Rio by the industrialized countries to reach the official development assistance target of 0.7 per cent must now be realized. A charter of global ethics should be developed in support of sustainable development.

Future international action should address the oceans, particularly the sustainable use of marine resources through improved environmental approaches to marine ecology; the protection and sustainable use of fresh water and wetland habitats, particularly in arid regions; the protection and sustainable use of forests and woodlands; and the problems of hazardous chemicals.

However, we would like to see better commitment to and results from the existing conventions on climate change, biodiversity and desertification before being convinced that more international conventions are the best mechanisms to tackle these issues.

In conclusion, we must never forget that we represent the hopes of millions of people who, at this moment, live in abject poverty in degraded and unhealthy environments. We have taken five years since Rio to get here. How much longer will we take to get to them?

Local, national and international efforts to fight poverty and protect and rehabilitate the environment are investments in a better future. Sustainable development is everyone's responsibility. With the leadership entrusted to us by our people and countries, we have a particular responsibility.

Today, on behalf of the Government and people of Namibia, I reaffirm our total commitment to the promotion and implementation of sustainable development in Namibia; to working in close partnership with the international community to promote global sustainability; and to setting specific targets and time-frames and to monitor and report on these as a means of improving our implementation of sustainable development. The next five years must be action years.

**The Acting President** (*interpretation from Spanish*): I thank the Minister of the Environment and Tourism of Namibia for his statement.

*The Honourable Gert Hanekom, Minister of the Environment and Tourism of Namibia, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The Acting President** (*interpretation from Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. John Afful, Minister of the Environment, Science and Technology of Ghana.

*Mr. John Afful, Minister of the Environment, Science and Technology of Ghana, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Mr. Afful** (Ghana): Five years ago we met in Rio de Janeiro to elaborate integrated strategies aimed at achieving two major goals: first, to halt and reverse the negative impact of human behaviour on the physical environment, and secondly, to promote sustainable economic development in all countries. These major

goals were to be achieved through a global partnership that would respect the interests of all and protect the integrity of the global environmental and developmental system.

In reviewing the implementation of the major conclusions of the Conference — Agenda 21 — we acknowledge the extensive efforts undertaken by Governments and international organizations to integrate economic, social and environmental objectives through the elaboration of new policies and strategies for sustainable development. We can also express some satisfaction at the progress achieved in institutional development, international consensus-building, public participation and private-sector contributions.

My country's commitment to the concept of sustainable development predates Rio, as the Government adopted a national environmental action plan in 1991. This plan aims at the sound management of natural resources and the environment and seeks not only to ensure reconciliation between economic development and natural-resource conservation but also to make a high-quality environment a key element supporting our country's economic and social development.

My country has since Rio taken a number of steps to see to the implementation of the Rio agreements as well as the Rio Conventions, which have all been ratified. A Ministry of Environment, Science and Technology has been established to oversee the integrated implementation of Agenda 21 and to ensure the use of science and technology as a tool for development.

Ghana has also evolved a strategy for its development dubbed "Vision 2020", which is built on the three pillars of sustainable development — social, economic and environmental. The programme is human-centred and based on the coordinated efforts of all Government agencies — national, regional and district, as well as the major groups defined in Agenda 21.

As part of the process of implementing Agenda 21, local Agenda 21s have been prepared for almost all the 110 districts of the country. With the approval of the country's Capacity 21 Programme, it is anticipated that the necessary capacity will be built in some of the districts to ensure that their development programmes achieve sustainability. The preparation of the local Agenda 21s has been in line with the Government's decentralization programme, which is transferring governance, especially in relation to development planning and implementation, to the lowest level of the country's political structure.

Above all, my Government has made poverty eradication an overriding priority in our quest for sustainable development because, as is the case in most other developing countries, many of our environmental problems are the result of poverty.

Despite the progress that has been made in implementing the Rio agreements, my Government's efforts have been constrained by inadequate financial resources as well as human and institutional capacity at both the national and district levels.

This special session must confront the rude fact that the state of the global environment is no better now than it was when we met in Rio five years ago. This is attributable to the fact that commitments made with respect to many critical areas of Agenda 21 and the Rio Conventions have remained largely unfulfilled. I wish to mention specifically in this regard the unfulfilled commitments in the areas of pollution emissions, unsustainable production and consumption patterns, provision of adequate financial resources, technical assistance and the transfer of environmentally sound technologies.

We take no pride in cataloguing these failures. We draw attention to them because it is the only way to keep faith with current realities and set clear priorities for the future.

The concept of sustainable development as a mean between the imperatives of development and the protection and conservation of the physical environment, including our natural resources, calls for the promotion of an international economic environment that is conducive to and supportive of the development efforts of all countries, particularly those of the developing world, many of which are still grappling with the provision of basic social services for their populations.

Therefore, while striving to fulfil our national obligations under Agenda 21, we also reiterate the need for the urgent fulfilment of commitments made at the global level. In this regard, the outcome of this review session, while reaffirming the Rio agreements as the foundation and long-term policy framework for sustainable development, should also address the issues of poverty, the external debt problem, the mobilization of new and additional financial resources for developing countries, market access for exports, capacity-building and the transfer of technology.

We believe that this is the best way to supplement national efforts and ensure the full implementation of Agenda 21 and the Rio agreements.

Allow me at this juncture to say a few words about the two unresolved sectoral issues of desertification and forests. Without seeking to preempt the discussions on desertification scheduled for September this year, it is our view that the best way to ensure effective implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa is to establish a global financial mechanism similar to the Global Environmental Facility that has the capacity to generate adequate financial resources to ensure effective implementation of the programmes to combat desertification. Establishing a mechanism that merely facilitates the mobilization of financial resources is one sure way of killing the Convention to Combat Desertification.

With respect to forests, it is our considered view that the question of a forest convention requires further in-depth consideration, given the divergent positions taken by various parties on the issue.

May I in conclusion express the firm commitment of the Government of Ghana to the further pursuit of the goals of sustainable development through the fulfilment of its obligations at both the national and international levels. May I also urge full support in all areas and by all parties for the global partnership forged at Rio, with the aim of achieving sustainable development for all and ensuring our ability to address effectively the challenges of the twenty-first century. We still believe that Rio provides the best basis for peaceful coexistence of the global community into the twenty-first century as partners in development.

**The Acting President** (*interpretation from Spanish*): I thank the Minister of the Environment, Science and Technology of Ghana for his statement.

*Mr. John Afful, Minister of the Environment, Science and Technology of Ghana, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The Acting President** (*interpretation from Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Albert Kakou Tiapani, Minister of the Environment of Côte d'Ivoire.

*Mr. Albert Kakou Tiapani, Minister of the Environment of Côte d'Ivoire, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Mr. Kakou Tiapani** (Côte d'Ivoire) (*interpretation from French*): I wish first of all to welcome the opportunity offered by this important session and to pay deserved tribute to all those who participated in the negotiating process of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, in the forefront of whom I am pleased to place the Office of the Secretary-General.

It has already been noted that in 1972 the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, held at Stockholm, promoted awareness of the dangers facing human society because of the degradation of its environment. Today, it is common knowledge too that the Rio Conference engendered an unprecedented international mobilization and has proved to be a historic event of prime importance in the relationship between human society and its environment. That meeting highlighted the close links that had to be established between environment and development and marked the emergence of the innovative concept of sustainable development.

Côte d'Ivoire was as actively involved in that process as its means allowed; we spared no effort to promote the idea of a common African position on environment and development, which was submitted and supported at Rio by all the countries of our continent.

As we take stock of our initial post-Rio performance, we must consider the individual and collective actions we have proposed to live up to our joint commitments. It is also important to take note of initiatives that we have been unable to take or that we have failed to bring to success for want of adequate means, courage or, quite simply, good will.

In this general context of concerns, where the establishment of the new world order has been so long in coming, Côte d'Ivoire itself has also had to face a number of challenges, with which it has been able to cope with notable political stability, reversing earlier trends and beginning a two-year period of economic growth.

Côte d'Ivoire knows that the resumption of economic growth poses certain risks for the environment and for the conservation of the natural resources that are our principal wealth. After a lengthy economic crisis

during which environmental degradation was largely blamed on poverty, we must take care not to fall into a cycle where the environment is sacrificed on the altar of economic growth targets. That is why Côte d'Ivoire has embarked, in addition to its recovery plan, on a series of reforms whose goals are in line with the main objectives of Agenda 21.

Following the Rio recommendations, we have drawn up a National Plan of Action for the Environment. My Government is now putting in place a national structure to implement the Plan, and thus to supervise the implementation of Agenda 21. Likewise, the implementation and follow-up of the conventions adopted at Rio is gradually taking place through sectoral projects aimed at our priority national environmental concerns.

A number of actions have begun to promote sustainable development in Côte d'Ivoire, including programmes to strengthen the institutional framework and the national environmental management capacity and to improve environmental evaluation and monitoring, as well as environmental outreach, education and information programmes, all promoting due participation by civil society.

In that connection, I can cite, among many other things: the environmental code, which establishes the general framework for strengthening laws dealing with the environment; the decree laying down rules and procedures applicable to environmental impact studies for development projects; the creation of a network of protected areas, which today comprise eight national parks, two nature and wildlife reserves and two full-fledged nature reserves, covering a total area of 1,969,450 hectares, as well as the improvement and management of 101 classified forests, covering an estimated area of 1,511,126 hectares, using procedures that promote co-management with farmers; water management, which is carried out by the High Commissioner for Water Resources; the management of human settlements, particularly regarding sanitation, drainage, waste management and ensuring the broadest possible access to services and equipment; a huge programme of integrated coastal-area management, which is being prepared to build on the initial success of the development programme for coastal communities; and the November 1994 ratification of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the formulation of two projects, one on an inventory of greenhouse gases, and the other on improving the energy efficiency of buildings in West Africa.

I wish to conclude by calling on all members truly to pool our efforts by making a joint effort: to reformulate national development policies duly to include environmental concerns; to change our production and consumption patterns through trade that is economically sustainable, humanly viable and profitable for all; to strengthen the effectiveness of the machinery of development assistance by targeting specific areas and providing different appropriate kinds of support to the actual recipients; effectively to increase the capacity of developing countries to reduce levels of poverty substantially; and to facilitate the involvement of various sectors of the population in the process of deciding on and implementing development programmes by promoting greater individual and collective awareness through education, training and outreach.

For my part, I am convinced that in Agenda 21 we have a pertinent, useful and beneficial programme of action, whose effective implementation will enable us to achieve the sustainable development to which all peoples legitimately aspire.

**The Acting President** (*interpretation from Spanish*): I thank the Minister of the Environment of Côte d'Ivoire for his statement.

*Mr. Albert Kakou Tiapani, Minister of the Environment of Côte d'Ivoire, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The Acting President** (*interpretation from Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Saifuddin Soz, Minister of the Environment and Forests of India.

*Mr. Saifuddin Soz, Minister of the Environment and Forests of India, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Mr. Soz** (India): It is an honour to be present on this occasion to review the progress of the implementation of Agenda 21 under the able guidance of the President of the General Assembly.

The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) launched a global partnership on environment and development, which acknowledged that sustained economic growth, the eradication of poverty and the attempt to meet the basic needs of the people constituted overriding priorities for developing countries. While we recognized that the right to development must be fulfilled so as to equitably meet developmental and environmental needs of present and future generations, it

was also recognized that meeting the environmental objectives in Agenda 21 would place additional, even onerous, burdens on developing countries. Therefore, we forged a balance between developmental and environmental imperatives and created a framework for assistance by the international community to complement and support the efforts of developing countries.

In the five years since Rio, there has been considerable progress at the national level. Many developing countries at considerable cost to themselves, have put local versions of Agenda 21 in place. In India, we are continuing to fight the battle against poverty and illiteracy. In the world's largest democracy, where many of the programmes of development are devolved to provincial governments, themselves subject to the pulls and pressures of democratic governance, we have put in place a legislative and policy framework as exhaustive as any in the world, to implement the commitments we undertook at UNCED.

We have evolved a National Conservation Strategy and Policy Statement on Environment and Development, a National Forestry Policy and a Policy Statement on Abatement of Pollution. We are in the process of debating a National Action Plan to consolidate conservation strategies in biodiversity. We have also attached the highest importance to a broad-based participatory approach, involving all sections of society, including non-governmental organizations and other major groups, in evolving a National Policy on Environment that recognizes the crucial role of women. To ensure complete transparency in this process, we have established a national statutory environment authority and are in the process of establishing a national mechanism to provide relief for accidents occurring during the handling of hazardous substances.

Recognizing the importance of regional cooperation for sustainable development, we hosted the Asian regional conference for the desertification Convention last year. The first meeting of Environment Ministers of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, hosted by India this year, was an important event, paving the way for a common approach, notably in the areas of biodiversity and hazardous-substance management. The first meeting of the Global Environment Facility Assembly in Delhi next year will be another such significant event.

At the international level, however, progress in the five years since Rio has been less encouraging. Admittedly, there has been some movement in institutional terms, as there has been in some of the Convention processes, notably on climate change, biodiversity, and desertification. We look forward to the third session of the Conference of the Parties to the Framework Convention on Climate Change at Kyoto, and hope that there will be a strengthening of commitments by developed countries, as agreed under the Berlin Mandate. The Intergovernmental Panel on Forests has done commendable work, and while it would be premature to evolve yet another convention, it would be useful to build on the Panel's recommendations. On chemicals, while India endorses the need for their sound management, it is imperative that the issues of access to the relevant technologies on preferential terms and of assistance for capacity-building are built into any international action that is contemplated.

The major issue we need to address at this special session is the disappointing lack of fulfilment of international commitments to assist developing countries, voluntarily entered into in Agenda 21 by industrialized countries. It is a matter of deep concern to India that five years after Rio, there is a discernible effort to erode the framework for partnership built at Rio, notably the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, with efforts being made to prescribe equal obligations and liabilities for unequal players.

India will not accept a renegotiation of Agenda 21 through the introduction of new issues. Some of these issues, such as labour standards or the relationship between trade and environment, do not enjoy international consensus in the form in which they have been introduced here, and are being debated elsewhere, in the appropriate forum. Little will be achieved by duplicating here the debate in the International Labour Organization or the World Trade Organization. It is a matter of grave concern that this forum is being used to reopen and distort the mandate and functioning of bodies such as the World Trade Organization, so recently established, by seeking to legitimize the use of environmental considerations as visible and invisible trade barriers.

Other post-Rio issues can be examined when the relevant conference outcomes are reviewed. Our mandate is not to discuss issues such as good governance, peace and security or human rights norms, which are the cornerstones on which all democracies are founded. Our task is only to review the implementation of Agenda 21, identify the constraints and evolve measures to accelerate implementation. In this effort, the emphasis will clearly

need to be on time-bound commitments by industrialized countries for transfer of resources and of technology on non-commercial terms, since these are the crucial variables if the objectives of sustainable development are to be achieved.

We are here to reconfirm our commitments to Rio, and we invite our partners in the developed world to do likewise. We would like to see an accelerated implementation of Agenda 21. We hope that by the time of the next review in 2002, there will be measurable progress to report, notably in the areas of financing and transfer of technology to developing countries.

**The Acting President** (*interpretation from Spanish*): I thank the Minister of the Environment and Forests of India for his statement.

*Mr. Saifuddin Soz, Minister of the Environment and Forests of India, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The Acting President** (*interpretation from Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Jozef Zlocha, Minister of the Environment of Slovakia.

*Mr. Jozef Zlocha, Minister of the Environment of Slovakia, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Mr. Zlocha** (Slovakia) (*interpretation from Russian*): It was 25 years ago, at the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm, that mankind started to deal with the protection of the environment on a global scale for the first time in history. Five years ago at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro we declared the right of everyone to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature. We also committed ourselves to find common solutions for economic, social and environmental issues. The starting points and approaches to ensuring sustainable development were outlined. Now, we are here to assess their effectiveness over time and to review the results throughout the world and in the specific conditions of certain countries.

Slovakia, a small country in the heart of Europe that has been independent for only five years, is gradually tackling the problems related to economic transformation and changes in the social sector and the redemption of past undesirable interference in the environment.

Only one year after UNCED we managed to adopt the Strategy of the State Environmental Policy at the highest level. This was followed in 1996 by a national programme of action. The right to protection of the environment and health was included as a basic right in the Constitution of the Slovak Republic. In five years we have set up a more or less complex environmental legal system of administration bodies whereby laws provide protection for all components of the environment and for the health of all.

We have established the State Environmental Fund to support economic activities in the field of environment. We clearly established the polluter-pays principle as the obligation to remove pollution at the source, along with a time schedule for the application of strict limits. We are making every effort to enhance the environmental awareness of our people and to support their activities developed in accordance with the principles of sustainable development.

Slovakia has acceded to most of the multilateral international conventions which have an environmental orientation. We have became a member of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Governing Council and of the Commission on Sustainable Development, and we are determined to meet the relevant commitments.

I would like to mention briefly the fact that during the last five years we have succeeded in remarkably reducing the emissions of pollutants released into the air. For example, sulphur dioxide has been reduced by 58.4 per cent, nitrous oxide by 20.1 per cent, carbon monoxide by 17.6 per cent, and solid particle pollution by 75.4 per cent.

We were able to reduce in recent years the emission of pollutants released into the air despite an increase in energy consumption of 5 to 12 per cent. This reduction is due to the fact that 50 per cent of the energy is produced by nuclear power plants, to a reduction in the use of coal in power stations and to the construction of desulphurization facilities. This has meant that the amount of noxious emissions has declined considerably. Due to this, and in connection with the Framework Convention on Climate Change, we have been able to adopt a national commitment to reduce emissions of carbon dioxide by 20 per cent of 1988 levels by 2005. This will enable us to reach the Toronto goal.

Nationally, we have introduced the exclusive use of unleaded gasoline. This reduced lead emissions by more than 60 per cent despite a considerable increase in the

number of motor vehicles. This year we have started the production of motor oil with a low sulphur content of only 0.05 per cent.

We produce less waste and promote its utilization as a secondary raw material. We fully meet the commitments of the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal. This has also been done by means of the Regional Training Centre for Central and Eastern Europe for the Basel Convention in Bratislava.

Considerable attention is now being paid to the protection of biodiversity, particularly in our system of 5 national parks, 16 protected landscape areas and 559 nature reservations. Our concern in this sphere is also demonstrated by the fact that in May 1998 Slovakia will host the fourth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity.

More than 40 per cent of our territory is still covered by forests. This contributes to improving ecological stability and the quality of air, as well as preserving biodiversity in Europe. Therefore, we support the adoption of a convention on forests.

More generally, with respect to the ongoing unfavourable changes in the environment all over the world and as well to the need to ensure sustainable development in all countries, we reconfirm the general validity of the programme areas, targets and activities contained in Agenda 21. We agree with the documents submitted and we support the Nairobi Declaration of 7 February 1997 on the role and mandate of the United Nations Environment Programme. We recommend strengthening the position of the Commission on Sustainable Development in the United Nations system so that it will be able to ensure the development, adoption and implementation of the World Sustainable Development Strategy and the Earth Charter for the twenty-first century.

I believe that, like the Slovak Republic, other countries have also made every effort, within the confines of their production and financial capabilities, to improve the environment during the past five years as they move towards reaching the goal of sustainable development. In any case, they have made more effort than in previous years.

However, it is clear that these efforts are not enough. The situation on the eve of the third millennium points to the fact that the environmental damage caused by humankind in the past, and quite recently, will not be easy to repair. We will need to make an extra effort and refrain from apportioning blame or responsibility. Responsibility for our "blue planet" and for the precious existence of humankind lies with each and every one of us. The way of life in the twenty-first century and the millennium after that, and how future generations, maybe even our own children and grandchildren, will judge us depends on us. There is no point in trying to justify ourselves or looking for culprits. Nobody can relieve us of our historic responsibility. This responsibility must dictate that all the measures we take in the future do not consciously or unconsciously lead us over the edge of the abyss.

The survival of humankind and the thousands of species that inhabit the Earth may be in our hands at this very moment.

**The Acting President** (*interpretation from Spanish*): I thank the Minister of the Environment of Slovakia for his statement.

*Mr. Jozef Zlocha, Minister of the Environment of Slovakia, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The Acting President** (*interpretation from Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Stanislaw Zelichowski, Minister of Environmental Protection, Natural Resources and Forestry of Poland.

*Mr. Stanislaw Zelichowski, Minister of Environmental Protection, Natural Resources and Forestry of Poland, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Mr. Zelichowski** (Poland) *(interpretation from French)*: The history of our civilization clearly shows that people have always been able to find a solution to difficult situations, provided they recognized the dangers that lurked. The most eminent authorities have alerted us to the serious threats posed to the world's environment. I would like to mention one of the greatest humanists of our time, Pope John Paul II, who has used his many encyclicals to speak of the challenges facing today's societies and has called on nations and Governments to remain united in their efforts to combat the crises facing the environment and human relations.

For the people gathered here, for whom Agenda 21 provides the bedrock of their daily activities, the declarations of this moral authority, which is devoted to balanced development, are very useful.

Poland had begun to apply the principles of sustainable development a year before the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro by adopting the National Environmental Policy, in May 1991. In its resolution, the Polish Parliament called for environment policy to be integrated into economic policies and strategies. The President of the Council of Ministers established the Commission on Sustainable Development at the highest governmental level to coordinate and supervise such integration.

Poland obtained significant results by implementing its national environmental policy and the principles of Agenda 21 at the same time. Economic growth between 1994 and 1996 reached six per cent of the gross national product per year, while energy consumption grew by a mere two per cent per year and total gas emissions were reduced by three per cent per year. The amount of wastewater was halved and the total volume of solid waste generated and disposed of fell by almost 30 per cent.

I have mentioned but a few of the results we have achieved primarily thanks to the policy of tightening up the requirements imposed on those who make use of elements of the environment. This policy has brought about enormous change at the level of development technologies and investment in the environmental field.

The system of economic instruments based on the principle that the user and polluter pay and an innovative system of financing investment for the environment have proven their worth. The Environment Fund has supported investments in the area of environmental protection and in other activities such as nature conservation, forest protection, and environmental education and research.

Investment in the environment tripled between 1990 and 1997. Stable economic and environmental policies have turned Poland into an attractive market for foreign investors.

Certain social groups have made a particular contribution to implementation of the principles of sustainable development, including the scientific community, women, young people, the business world and, especially, ecological organizations and movements.

We in Poland are paying particular attention to protecting forests and increasing their resources. In the latter half of the century, the surface area of forest land has been increased by about 1.5 million hectares and between now and the year 2020, 700,000 additional hectares will be reafforested.

Polish scientists and experts helped draw up Agenda 21 and took an active part in the work of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development. They were also active in the drafting of the documents we are going to adopt during this session, namely the political statement and the plan of action up to the year 2002.

Poland deeply appreciated the effects of the implementation of the Rio recommendations and the work carried out in this area by the United Nations. We listened carefully to the report of the Commission on Sustainable Development, for which we thank and congratulate the Chairman of the Commission.

We reaffirm that the idea of sustainable development and the Rio recommendations are no less relevant today. Poland hopes that the objectives of Agenda 21 will be reflected in the political statement which will be adopted this week. At the same time, Poland wishes to express its political will to implement this concept in its national policy.

The plan of action, which develops the ideas formulated by the statement, and the five-year programme of work of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development were the product of difficult discussions. The plan is a compromise between the opinions, policies and the interests of different actors dominating the world stage at the turn of the millennium. It expresses what ties and not what divides nations and ushers in a new millennium. This also provides for a smooth transition and run-up to the twenty-first century, the century of balanced sustainable development. Poland is ready to agree to the plan and declares that it will play an active role in implementing it.

The plan of action for the implementation of Agenda 21 which has been submitted to the General Assembly for discussion and adoption is an ambitious, yet realistic, programme. I am firmly convinced that in 2002, when we will meet again, our opinions on the implementation of Agenda 21 will not be less favourable than today and there will be considerably fewer outstanding problems. Poland will do its best to ensure that this goal is reached.

**The Acting President** (*interpretation from Spanish*): I thank the Minister of Environmental Protection, Natural Resources and Forestry of Poland for his statement.

*Mr. Stanislaw Zelichowski, Minister of Environmental Protection, Natural Resources and Forestry of Poland, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The Acting President** (*interpretation from Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Samak Sundaravej, Deputy Prime Minister of Thailand.

*Mr. Samak Sundaravej, Deputy Prime Minister of Thailand, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Mr. Sundaravej** (Thailand): I would like to share with members of the Assembly and other representatives some of Thailand's experiences in the implementation of Agenda 21 and in areas in which further efforts by national Governments are required. In addition, we believe that it is vital for a successful outcome of this meeting that we consider ways and means in which we can all work together as a world community to better achieve the goals of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.

I shall start by relating one of our success stories. As a signatory of the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, in January 1997 Thailand became the first developing country to phase out the use of chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) in refrigerator manufacture and to use trade measures to protect the atmospheric environment. Government regulations banned the import and production of CFC refrigerators in Thailand after 1 January 1997 and reduced import taxes on some materials used in the production of CFC-free refrigerators. The process was, of course, costly, painful and not without resistance. This experience is a noteworthy example of a determined domestic policy and international cooperation within the framework of the Montreal Protocol.

Thailand is proud of its record in its attempts to implement Agenda 21. Details of our attempts, including strategies and constraints, are documented in our country report booklet, entitled *Thailand's Action for Sustainable Development*, which we will make available to all interested parties.

Looking beyond one's country, within the ambit of Agenda 21, our experiences tell us that three areas in particular need to be strengthened if we are determined to ensure that the impact on resources of present-day development will not imperil the life opportunities of our children. They are the transfer of technology, the increase in official development assistance (ODA) and better disciplined patterns of consumption.

Thailand found, as shown in our country report, that technology transfer is essential in our drive for sustainable development and the maintenance and improvement of our environment. A good example is our transformation from CFC usage. Necessary or appropriate technology should be accessible and cheap, given that this world is our common heritage. Any country with a national will to face the necessary sacrifice should be encouraged and assisted by all available means.

This brings me to the increase in ODA. Of course, in these days and age of privatization, foreign direct investment is often encouraged by developed countries as a substitute for ODA. But this may not be valid for all countries and then only to a certain extent. For most countries not yet attractive enough for foreign direct investment, not only environmental programmes but also economic programmes cannot be implemented for lack of funds. Thailand is lucky to be able to self-finance part of its programmes under Agenda 21, but many other developing countries are not in a position to start implementing Agenda 21 without the necessary funding through ODA.

It is also undeniable that the biggest issue posed by the challenge of environment is that of resources versus consumption. If we, particularly the affluent societies, maintain the present consumption patterns and expect a higher standard of material well-being year after year, we surely will be creating environmental debts for our children. And no matter how much is put into ODA or the transfer of technology, the damage will have been done, and possibly irrecoverably.

We are here at the special session to review and reaffirm international commitment to the goals and documents we agreed to five years ago in Rio. Each country has gone through various phases and levels in pursuit of its implementation of Agenda 21. But in this globalized world of environmental protection, we cannot do it alone. Relevant United Nations or United Nations related bodies, particularly the Global Environment Facility (GEF), should assist developing countries to perform their tasks, especially in dealing with the monitoring and studying of lessons learned from progress and setbacks in implementation at the national level, in order to accelerate implementation at the regional and international levels.

In this connection, Thailand expects the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to play a more significant role, in close cooperation with the Commission on Sustainable Development. As a United Nations body with regional offices, UNEP roles and resources can be strengthened to enable it to oversee and

coordinate regional cooperation in various parts of the world in a more meaningful fashion.

Let me conclude by emphasizing the fact that the road to sustainable development is a challenging one for all of us. We believe that we should begin at home, and now. The Rio Summit produced Agenda 21 as a guide for us all to implement. There are problems ahead that need global partnership, collaborative efforts, strong will and coordination in order to translate our decisions into realities. Increased access to relevant technology on environmental protection, increased ODA, living up to promises to contribute to the GEF, and a more disciplined and less wasteful consumption pattern will help move us a long way forward.

Success can be within our grasp. We must not let down future generations through our inaction today. The cost of delaying action is incalculable and could prove devastating to mankind.

**The Acting President** (*interpretation from Spanish*): I thank the Deputy Prime Minister of Thailand for his statement.

*Mr. Samak Sundaravej, Deputy Prime Minister of Thailand, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The Acting President** (*interpretation from Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Johny Lahure, Minister of the Environment of Luxembourg.

*Mr. Johny Lahure, Minister of the Environment of Luxembourg, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Mr. Lahure** (Luxembourg) (*interpretation from French*): At the outset, I wish to stress that I fully associate myself with the statement made by the Prime Minister of the Netherlands, Mr. Wim Kok, on behalf of the European Union.

We cannot afford the luxury of losing sight of the commitments made at Rio. It is crucial that we ensure their genuine implementation and pragmatic follow-up by undertaking firm political commitments accompanied by realistic targets.

Current world development is characterized by global trends that run counter to such a future scenario. We are afflicted by demographic growth, growing poverty in certain parts of the world, climate change, deforestation, the extinction of plant and animal species, water shortages and so on. Considering these trends, what political leader could seriously doubt that the introduction of sustainable development at the world level will, within the span of one generation, become a question of mankind's survival?

A policy that is geared towards a sustainable development model is conceivable and feasible only through international political intervention — an intervention that implies a spirit of cooperation and solidarity among the industrialized countries, the developing countries and the poorest parts of the world. Luxembourg, a nation that has one of the highest standards of living in the world, is bound to participate in such a cooperative policy and to demonstrate an unswerving spirit of solidarity because we recognize this to be an ethical requirement and obligation.

Global strategies have been drawn up and implemented in the form of conventions or international declarations that our country has signed. Although many of the objectives contained in those strategies can be achieved only as part of either a European or pan-European or possibly global strategy, Luxembourg intends to assume its share of responsibility at the national level. The following global objectives, which have been negotiated at the worldwide level, have been incorporated into a national strategy for sustainable development.

Luxembourg actively supports the objective of halving the percentage of the world's population living in a state of absolute poverty by the year 2015. The eradication of poverty is the main purpose of Luxembourg's development aid. Luxembourg's declared objective is to achieve by the year 2000 official development aid of 0.7 per cent of its gross national product. In 1996, that aid is estimated to have been 0.43 per cent of the gross national product. Much of this aid is used to meet basic needs. Luxembourg will make a special effort in the case of the poorest countries by allocating to them at least 0.15 per cent of its gross national product and by helping to relieve their debt burden.

Sustainable consumption and production patterns are first and foremost a challenge for the industrialized countries. In keeping with the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities for all countries, the industrialized countries will have to play a pioneering role in this area. A considerable improvement in eco-efficiency should be sought. The breadth of change that will be required to achieve sustainable development can

be estimated as representing on the average a tenfold increase in resource productivity in comparison with current productivity levels. This result should be achieved by the middle of the next century. A fourfold increase in resource productivity in the coming decades does not seem to be beyond our reach.

The recent climatic change requires immediate action. Together with its European partners, Luxembourg will commit itself, during the conference on climatic change to be held in Kyoto, to effect a reduction in greenhouse gases from 1990 levels of 7.5 per cent by the year 2005 and 15 per cent by the year 2010. Along these lines, Luxembourg has committed itself to reduce its own emissions by 30 per cent for the period 1990-2010.

Five years after Rio, the commitments undertaken on deforestation and existing cooperation programmes have not succeeded in reversing in any way the loss and degradation of forests. To this end, the protection and sustainable management of forests worldwide must be ensured by a global convention on forests between now and the year 2000. This convention should provide a general framework for actions taken with respect to forested areas regarding the conservation and sustainable development of all kinds of forests.

Luxembourg, a signatory to the Convention on Biological Diversity, favours the creation under that Convention of a worldwide network of protected areas that are particularly high in biodiversity on the basis of compensatory machinery and remuneration for those countries and peoples that respect the need to ensure that the genetic potential of the planet survives.

Worldwide, the availability and the quality of drinking water is steadily decreasing. A global initiative for water should be launched under the auspices of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development. That initiative should deal with the protection, utilization and the sustainable management of water at the international level.

Luxembourg will intensify its role in international action to strengthen the environmental component of international cooperation, in particular by emphasizing technical assistance in environmental matters and in sustainable development, technological cooperation and the transfer of new technologies in order to help build the capacity of countries.

The political action and the expressions of political will that have been expressed at the highest level by States Members of the United Nations are of crucial importance. We can achieve our goals only if there is active participation on the part of all countries and all socio-economic sectors within those countries. If sustainable development is — as no one can doubt, if only by dint of the precautionary principle — the essential purpose of international policy, it is important to envisage a method of ensuring that there is an open and responsible participatory implementation among all nations and at the national level.

In order to ensure success in this cooperation, it is essential that we emphasize a functional reform of the United Nations agencies that are in charge of programmes, strategies and the assessment of environmental and sustainable development policies. We hope that the Commission on Sustainable Development will play a major strategic role in this field, which is of concern to us, and that it will effectively monitor international action to achieve the Rio scenario.

Luxembourg has already laid the groundwork of an open-ended consultation procedure in order to achieve a broad consensus on the implementation of a national plan for sustainable development. We wish to involve our country in this area — that is, to create a dynamic process among all present and future stakeholders.

**The Acting President** (*interpretation from Spanish*): I thank the Minister of the Environment of Luxembourg for his statement.

*Mr. Johny Lahure, Minister of the Environment of Luxembourg, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The Acting President** (*interpretation from Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Vartan Oskanian, First Deputy Foreign Minister of Armenia.

*Mr. Vartan Oskanian, First Deputy Foreign Minister of Armenia, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Mr. Oskanian** (Armenia): In June 1992, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development substantially heightened comprehension of the global environmental threat. The commitment of 178 Governments to achieving sustainable development was the major agreement that emerged from the Earth Summit.

Five years later, this special session of the General Assembly is another outstanding opportunity to convey to

the world that appropriate efforts to save and restore the environment and overcome social poverty are the most profitable investments for a better future, for this and coming generations.

At the time of the 1992 Rio Summit, Armenia's independence was less than a year old. Despite the severity and urgency of the wide range of economic, social and political issues facing the country, environmental issues and concerns were never given a back seat on Armenia's development agenda.

After all, it was Armenia's environmental movement of the mid-1980s that later evolved into the democratic and independence movement. Armenians had already begun to weigh the ecological price of industrialization. Armenian environmentalists were concerned with industrial pollution and its implications for the country's air and water and the people's health. What began as a concern of scientists, educators and writers grew into a popular mass movement involving most of the country's 4 million people.

Since Rio, we have all seen an increased understanding of the links between macroeconomic policies and the sustainability of development. We have certainly come to understand that while economic progress is an essential component of development, it is not the only one, because development is not purely an economic phenomenon. Ultimately, it must encompass more than the material and financial aspects of people's lives.

Development should therefore be perceived as a multidimensional process involving the reorganization and reorientation of entire economic and social systems. In addition to improvements in incomes and output, it typically involves radical changes in institutional, social and administrative structures as well as in popular attitudes and, in many cases, even in customs and beliefs.

Cognizant of and committed to this notion of development, Armenia's Government, right after independence, launched broad macroeconomic reforms aimed at attaining sustainability by changing the incentives available to individuals and institutions.

A sharp decline in social spending, however, which is typical of the former socialist economies, caused a dramatic growth in the vulnerable stratum of our population. The presence of more than 300,000 refugees as a result of the Nagorny Karabakh conflict further exacerbated the situation. To address this problem, the Government of Armenia devised a viable social safety net through improved targeting. Today, nearly 68 per cent of Armenia's population lives in an urban setting. There is an urgent need not simply to construct and renovate the areas destroyed by the 1988 earthquake, but also to adjust the safety requirements for all existing facilities. Additionally, a lack of public investment in infrastructure and the underdevelopment of the legal framework for housing are among the main impediments to sustainable management of human settlements. We expect that recently-passed legislation on local and municipal governance and reformed local administrative structures will result in a positive trend.

In areas of international concern, such as Lake Sevan and Lake Arpi, which are registered in the Directory of Wetlands of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, we are prepared to continue to cooperate with concerned regional and global organizations. For Armenia, Lake Sevan represents an emotional and economic enigma. This, the largest freshwater alpine lake in all of Europe and Asia, occupies one fifth of the territory of Armenia. It is the biggest reservoir of fresh water in the region. The Armenian Government has succeeded in finding ways to prevent a dangerous drop in the water level, while utilizing the lake's potential. Lake Sevan continues to be the greatest single source of the hydroelectric power that is so necessary to an energy-poor, landlocked and blockaded country.

The gradual price liberalization and decentralization of distribution networks for various energy products is an example of a market-based solution which has produced visibly successful results in Armenia. It is not always possible to implement the most desirable policy initiatives, those that generate income as well as ecological improvement.

For a small country like Armenia, without many natural resources, the safety and protection of our human and environmental resources becomes even more crucial. Armenia's accession to such international agreements and conventions as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa and others is due as much to our willingness to join the international network of environmental advocates, as to our wish to demonstrate our internal, integrated approach to economic and social growth and sustainability.

National policies and the fulfilment of international obligations should be conducted in a way that fosters and ensures overall positive global trends. We believe that the United Nations system has a key role in defining priorities, disseminating relevant information and implementing global and regional agreements and international initiatives that facilitate the long and slow process of building sustainable development.

Armenia takes its ecological destiny seriously and is committed to securing decent living conditions for its population. Armenia hopes that this special session will take decisions to further integrate environmental and social concerns into the day-to-day regulatory tools of the international economy, and thus ensure that quality of life issues are addressed in a way more likely to lead to their successful resolution.

**The Acting President** (*interpretation from Spanish*): I thank the First Deputy Foreign Minister of Armenia for his statement.

*Mr. Vartan Oskanian, First Deputy Foreign Minister of Armenia, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The Acting President** (*interpretation from Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Roble Olhaye, Chairman of the Delegation of Djibouti.

*Mr. Roble Olhaye, Chairman of the Delegation of Djibouti, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Mr. Olhaye** (Djibouti): This critical special session is fortunate to have the benefit of the leadership and experience of Ambassador Razali Ismail. We are certain that his vision and dedication will have a far-reaching effect on our deliberations. In the same vein, we also wish to express our appreciation to the Secretary-General and the Secretariat for their remarkable efforts in bringing this session together.

The decade of the 1990s has been one of unusually high hopes and expectations. With the end of the cold war, symbolized so dramatically by the fall of the Berlin Wall some seven years ago, mankind has sought to address the problems facing the world, seeking to make it a better place. We have seen the emergence of a new era of global peace and security, and a stunning decline in the prospects for nuclear confrontation. The way was clearly open for a period of unprecedented economic and social progress.

With this positive landscape in international relations and expectations, the United Nations embarked upon a series of unprecedented global conferences addressing key issues facing mankind, ranging from environment, human rights, population, social development, women and human settlements to food security. But significantly, the sequence of conferences began in 1992 with the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development — the Earth Summit — in Rio de Janeiro, perhaps history's most important human gathering, devoted to the state of the environment and the need to protect it from further destruction. From that Conference emerged a series of treaties, commitments and strategies to guide us in the implementation of the action plan, labelled Agenda 21. Now, five years later, we are here to review and appraise our performance under Agenda 21, or, in simple terms, to see what has been accomplished and how many pledges have remained unfulfilled.

Assessing our environment today leads us to a disturbing picture, and the inescapable conclusion is that little has been achieved in the intervening five years. Hardly any of the commitments made at Rio have been kept. Target levels set for carbon dioxide emissions under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change have not been met — emissions have, in fact, worsened. So it is not surprisingly that, in most areas of the world, air and water pollution are on the rise, forest areas the size of Nepal are being lost, and oceans are polluted with toxic chemicals and waste, and are being overfished. Of particular concern is the declining availability of fresh water, and its impact on the productive farmland needed to feed the world's growing population and bursting cities.

Recognizing that the environment is inseparably linked to growth, Agenda 21 contains a number of explicit and implicit commitments on the part of both industrialized and developing countries. For the latter, lacking the necessary resources, some effort to restructure and open their economies, tighten fiscal and monetary policies and allow a wider role for the private sector was expected. Many developing countries have indeed undertaken serious measures towards liberalizing and restructuring their economies. Even in Africa the number of countries pursuing fundamental reforms has tripled since Rio. Developed countries, on the other hand, committed themselves to providing the necessary resources to fund development and environmental protection. They also agreed to initiate changes in their unsustainable patterns of consumption and production.

This session is confronted with the onerous task not only of pointing to the imbalances that have emerged since Rio between the advances in political and economic reforms achieved in the third world and the clearly diminishing resources to fund sustainable development, but also of securing a renewed commitment, with firm assurances, to stronger financial aid.

Certainly, the fact that the expected official development assistance, to which commitments were made under Agenda 21, failed to materialize was a disappointment to the developing world. Stunningly, it continues to decline. Western donors at Rio reaffirmed their commitment to the United Nations aid target of 0.7 per cent of gross domestic product, roughly equal to the $125 billion promised under Agenda 21. To date, only five countries have met this target, and for that we thank them.

The only other significant source of financing for the environment has been the Global Environment Facility, with some $2 billion in pledges. Even this sum is insufficient for the task at hand and needs to be increased. As has been noted, this would enable us to finance certain environmental initiatives which lack their own funding mechanisms, such as the Convention to Combat Desertification.

While the inflow of official development assistance is largely unrealized, developing countries are saddled with the crushing burden of international debt. Well over one quarter of Africa's export earnings are siphoned off to meet debt service. Despite much discussion, meetings and fanfare, it remains a barrier to development, particularly for the very poor. Debt forgiveness for them looks to be the only viable alternative.

Djibouti, for example, suffers from a destructive combination of natural and man-made forces. It is penetrated almost throughout by the encroaching desert, and the inadequacy of rainfall has severely reduced our useable farmland below levels which can sustain our people. One result has been the slow disappearance of fresh water. Unfortunately our region of Africa has also seen more than its share of political turmoil in the past two decades, resulting in a wave of refugees which, in Djibouti, is now approaching 10 per cent of the population.

Attempts to reform without additional resources from the international community, either by way of official development assistance or private capital, have left us with few options to improve our environment or the lives of our people. For these reasons the role of the multilateral lending institutions looms large, and it is vital that their capacities be augmented, particularly those of the International Development Association.

Developing countries will also require considerable assistance from the United Nations in implementing effective environmental programmes, a problem which perhaps all countries face to some extent. We should therefore consider augmenting the resources of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and other agencies in this respect. This need is highlighted in the summary of the results of the Rio + 5 Forum, transmitted by the Permanent Representative of Brazil to the Secretary-General (A/S-19/11), which states that the basic concept of sustainable development is not yet well understood and that the policies and structures required to implement the Earth Summit agreements are still not in place. Although the Summit identified the need to provide better mechanisms and policy instruments to translate the agreements and subsequent experience into effective action at local, national and sectoral levels, much remains to be done. There is a widespread need for more coherent and consistent policies, legal frameworks, fiscal and budgetary processes, institutional mechanisms, communication and education programmes, and better coordination between environmental and other ministries.

Perhaps we have not reached the point of no return in the degradation of our planet, but with rising poverty in far too many places on earth, and with continued inability to reverse pollution in others, the trend is serious. Environmental protection and health cannot exist with poverty or lack of will. In Agenda 21 we have committed ourselves to taking an integrated series of measures, with targets and time frames. Our failure to meet them evidences a disturbing loss of urgency and dedication, without which the task may overwhelm us. If for no other reason than to keep our faith in ourselves and humanity, we must meet the conditions of Agenda 21.

**The Acting President** (*interpretation from Spanish*): I thank the Chairman of the delegation of Djibouti for his statement.

*Mr. Roble Olhaye, Chairman of the delegation of Djibouti, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The Acting President** (*interpretation from Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Huseyin Çelem, Chairman of the delegation of Turkey.

*Mr. Huseyin Çelem, Chairman of the delegation of Turkey, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Mr. Çelem** (Turkey): Five years ago we launched a new global partnership for sustainable development. The reason behind such an initiative was the paramount need to reconcile the process of development with its impact on the environment, putting the human being at the very centre of concerns for sustainable development. The ultimate goal of this initiative was the preservation of our common heritage, this planet, as a healthy and viable place for future generations. Such a vital, challenging and lofty task still looms before us.

Although the world community set out on the right path with the adoption of Agenda 21 in Rio, and although steps are being taken on the national and international levels towards achieving our goals, globalization, economic and social disparities, pressing agricultural and industrial needs, serious financial constraints and technological deficiencies all combine to make sustainable development an elusive target.

In this context, financial assistance and transfer of technologies, the integration of a gender perspective and the effective participation of non-governmental organizations, as well as youth, are critical factors in the realization of sustainable development. The accelerated implementation of Agenda 21 is the great task that we face as we approach the twenty-first century. This special session of the General Assembly is therefore of vital importance for all of us.

During these last five years our initial predictions concerning sustainable development have been justified insofar as this process has proved to be a very complex global endeavour embodying all aspects of human life and requiring awareness and active participation at all levels. The growing awareness about environmental issues has become one of the key indicators of the democratization process. This multifaceted process of sustainable development necessitates constant and close multilateral cooperation as well as concerted efforts on a regional and national basis.

For its part, Turkey, by virtue of its geographical location, has striven to play a leading role in several regional activities related to the implementation of Agenda 21 in the Mediterranean, the Black Sea, the Caucasus and Central Asia. Since 1994, Turkey has hosted the programme coordination unit of the programme for the environmental management and protection of the Black Sea, which is supported by the Global Environment Facility. It supports the implementation of the Black Sea Strategic Action Plan, which aims at protecting and rehabilitating the Black Sea. Here, I must emphasize that Turkey attaches great importance to the safe transport and transboundary movement of hazardous wastes and dangerous goods through the marine environment and sensitive ecological areas.

We have signed bilateral agreements with a number of countries to form the basis for enhanced interaction in the field of environment and sustainable development. Turkey has also played a prominent role in the formulation of a regional Agenda 21 for the Central Asian, Caucasian and Balkan region. We have taken concrete steps towards the establishment of a regional environmental centre which will offer environmental information and training and act as a clearing house for those countries of the region which are in the process of developing their environmental policies and establishing legal and administrative infrastructures.

Turkey, with a financial contribution from the European Union, is in the process of creating a national environment and development observatory to ensure sustainable development at the national level. The Turkish observatory is expected to strengthen relations and partnerships with international agencies and networks related to environment and to help the integration of environment and development, in order to achieve sustainable development.

In terms of the implementation of Agenda 21 in Turkey, I am pleased to inform you that the drafts of the Turkish National Environmental Action Plan and of the National Agenda 21 have been completed.

Priority has been given to water management in the final document to be adopted at this special session. This has been reaffirmed in the new initiative of the European Union. Indeed, the sustainable use of resources is an essential component of the global development concept. Turkey, with the Southeastern Anatolian Project, which aims at mobilizing the water and soil resources in southeastern Turkey, has been implementing a cross-sectoral approach comprising integrated sustainable regional development, human resources development, sustainable human settlements and sustainable use of natural resources.

In connection with our activities in the area of forestry, which is crucial for sustainable development, I

would like to remind you that the Eleventh World Forestry Congress will be held later this year in Antalya, Turkey. The Congress is expected to respond to the current challenge of sustainable forest management and the introduction of appropriate technologies for the sustainable use of forest resources by present and future generations.

In respect of major efforts to achieve sustainable development, we are encouraged to note that the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), the City Summit, held in Istanbul last year, has begun to generate a new momentum on urban policies and shelter issues with a view to bringing to life the goals set out at the Earth Summit.

Returning to my initial remarks, I can say that at the national and global level we have tremendous ground to cover, much more than what we have done so far. We believe that as inhabitants of planet Earth, against a background of an increasingly vulnerable environment and facing the daunting challenge of achieving sustainable development, we need more than ever before to pull all our strength together and to strive to the very best of our abilities to convert our commitments into deeds.

In this respect, we would like to stress the requirement to demonstrate the political will and make sacrifices to bring to life the goals set by Agenda 21. I would like to reiterate my Government's continued determination to contribute to this process. It is our fervent hope and desire that the successful outcome of this special session will constitute a major step in that direction.

**The Acting President** (*interpretation from Spanish*): I thank the Chairman of the delegation of Turkey for his statement.

*Mr. Huseyin Çelem, Chairman of the delegation of Turkey was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The Acting President** (*interpretation from Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Saeb Erakat, Chairman of the Observer delegation of Palestine.

*Mr. Saeb Erakat, Chairman of the Observer delegation of Palestine, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Mr. Erakat** (Palestine) (*interpretation from Arabic*): The era of the nineties witnessed the convening of several international conferences under the auspices of the United Nations to discuss various persistent and serious problems and important international issues of concern to world leaders and all peoples on Earth. All of these conferences generated an increase in the awareness of the specific issues under consideration. They resulted in the conclusion of important international agreements and an increase in the international commitment for cooperation and for joint efforts aimed at the achievement of sustainable development. They also resulted in the establishment of the necessary environment for the growth of stability, prosperity and peaceful and amicable relations between nations.

Those conferences also reflected the correlation and integration of these various issues and the importance of guaranteeing the widest participation possible in order to improve the quality of life for all human beings by means of collective responsibility towards future generations. To secure and safeguard the right of the child to life, development and education, to guarantee the rights of women and to guarantee respect for human rights, including the right of peoples to self-determination and sovereignty over their natural resources, are agreed-upon axioms contained in the documents and declarations of those conferences.

Since the convening of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992, there have been some achievements and progress with regard to the implementation of Agenda 21 in several fields on national, regional and international levels. However, the condition of the global environment continues to deteriorate. At the same time, globalization trends have not had a positive impact on sustainable development, in spite of the fact that a limited number of developing nations are actually benefitting from these trends.

However, there are a number of other nations which have not achieved the anticipated goals to benefit from the process of globalization, and they continue to be marginalized. The majority of developing nations are still in need of international aid to help them achieve sustainable development. In this connection, developing nations have voiced their disappointment regarding the commitment of developed nations in transferring technology and increasing official development assistance, which has drastically decreased since 1992.

Wars and armed conflicts undoubtedly prevent the achievement of economic, social and human development and directly contribute to the destruction of the environment and the depletion of natural, financial and human resources. Furthermore, the continuation of

foreign occupation, the resulting denial of the basic rights of peoples under occupation, the exploitation of their natural resources, the destruction of the social and economic structure of the occupied territories, especially as regards the environment — all these factors are direct causes of wars and conflict. The Palestinian people have suffered from such a situation for 30 years and still continue to suffer from the mentality and policies of the Israeli occupation. These are embodied in the continuation of the occupation, the expansion of colonial settlements, the Judaization of Jerusalem, the closure policy and the denial of the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and control over their natural resources.

Israel, the occupying Power, has for the last 30 years exploited the natural resources of the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and has confiscated land and uprooted trees with the aim of expanding the settlements, building bypass roads and transferring water to the settlements and to the interior of Israel. It has also used the occupied Palestinian territory as a backyard to dispose of its waste. Furthermore, Israel's nuclear programme — which is not subject to international supervision and regulations — threatens the region with a dangerous environmental disaster, in addition to the fact that its possession of nuclear weapons will force the region into a destructive nuclear race.

The Rio Declaration contains Principle 23, which states that

> "The environment and natural resources of people under oppression, domination and occupation shall be protected."

This principle, in addition to other international documents and relevant United Nations resolutions, affirms the responsibility of the international community and the United Nations towards the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and towards the Palestinian people and their rights. It is unreasonable for the international community to allow Israel to continue its intransigent stance and to continue rejecting compliance with resolutions of international legitimacy and international agreements, as it has done heedlessly for more than thirty years, particularly now that the peace process, which is being obstructed by Israel, is under way in the Middle East.

The latest Israeli position, which obstructed the Secretary-General's mission which he carried out in accordance with resolution ES-10/2, adopted by the General Assembly at its tenth emergency special session, is considered flagrant defiance of the will of the international community and debilitates efforts to achieve stability and peace in the Middle East region. In this context, we will request the resumption of the tenth emergency special session to review the report of the Secretary-General and to urge the international community to exercise its responsibilities to force the Israeli Government to cease its policies and its illegal practices in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and to implement the agreements reached.

The Palestinian people look forward to the day when they, in their own independent State, can undertake their roles and responsibilities in the implementation of Agenda 21 like all other nations of the world.

**The Acting President** (*interpretation from Spanish*): I thank the Chairman of the Observer delegation of Palestine for his statement.

*Mr. Saeb Erakat, Chairman of the Observer delegation of Palestine, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The Acting President** (*interpretation from Spanish*): The next speaker is Ms. Elizabeth Dowdeswell, Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme.

*Ms. Elizabeth Dowdeswell, Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Ms. Dowdeswell** (United Nations Environment Programme): The message of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio was one of hope and exhilaration. The world was about to change in some very positive and fundamental ways. But, astonishingly, even this great event has so far failed to alter the course of humanity sufficiently to put us on a sustainable trajectory. With very sober reflection this week, it is clear that, notwithstanding some progress, the will to take action has proven elusive.

Some of the most convincing proof of this is in the United Nations Environment Programme's *Global Environment Outlook*. It concludes that humanity is polluting and using up vital renewable resources — fresh water, urban air, forests and soils — faster than they can regenerate themselves.

The facts are well known. For example, some 1.7 billion people, more than one third of the world's population, are without a supply of safe water. Acid rain and transboundary air pollution, once considered problems only in Europe and parts of North America, are now increasingly apparent in parts of Asia and the Pacific and in Latin America. Degradation of drylands continues to be an urgent global problem, placing some one billion people in 110 countries at risk.

Our failures are most pronounced in precisely those areas we spoke of so proudly in Rio — climate change and biodiversity. We are failing to arrest global warming even though we are already seeing the effects decades before expected. We are also failing to reverse the trend of plant and animal extinctions and the loss of biodiversity.

And a whole host of new problems emerges — among them the proliferation of harmful chemicals throughout the biosphere and, consequently, in our bodies, wreaking havoc with hormonal processes and quite possibly affecting reproductive patterns.

In the immediate future, the international community must establish priorities in a decisive manner. Governments have already spoken this week and last week of the need for a global strategy on energy, a reinvigoration of action on fresh water, continued momentum on oceans and a global agreement on a path forward on forests. In very practical terms, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) can be helpful in advancing action in all of these priority areas.

It is obvious that without a comprehensive sustainable energy strategy, global warming will continue unabated, urban air with continue to deteriorate and marine pollution will not be halted. Whether or not Governments decide to launch an "energy decade" or make some other firm commitment to pursue a path towards sustainable energy, UNEP is prepared to apply its expertise and excellence in the area of cleaner production. We are prepared to step up our efforts, in collaboration with industrial sectors, to achieve necessary goals and targets. Additionally, UNEP continues to test and share environmentally sound technologies and provide a clearing house for information.

UNEP firmly believes that the intergovernmental dialogue on fresh water is long overdue. Integrated water management is our area of expertise and experience.

In Africa, for example, that dialogue is already under way. Our unique "fair share" approach, which is based on consideration of the three Es — environmental protection, economic development and social equity — is designed to ensure adequate and clean supplies of water for all.

In the International Year of the Ocean, the implementation of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities is one of UNEP's highest priorities. Within this context, the concerns of small island developing States must be paramount. But more is needed. We need to give thought to an oceans assessment and a genuine examination of the synergies and complementarities of new action on oceans vis-a-vis the existing regional seas programmes of UNEP, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and pressing fisheries management issues.

Our great expectations demand the effective engagement of civil society. Governments must commit themselves to fostering a new generation of environmental citizens. People, young and old, must gain the capacity to make sound environmental decisions, to act instinctively to protect life on Earth. To do so, they must have better, not just more, environmental information. Schools and centres for learning must provide opportunities for students to learn about the environment and sustainable development. Non-governmental organizations must be given their place in the decision-making process, and women must be empowered. That is the premise upon which our Global Environment Citizenship Programme is built.

But will this agenda be enough? How can we be sure that five years from now real results will be demonstrated?. We know that no environmental issue has yet emerged that is not within the capabilities of the human race to resolve. We have tremendous knowledge and technological capability. And we have very compelling evidence on most issues for the need to act. But, somehow, what is still missing is the political will to do so. Surely, this week we must be asking ourselves why.

Perhaps the most compelling explanation for the yawning gap between expressions of will and action can be found in the phenomenon of globalization. While there are, no doubt, benefits that arise from trade liberalization, growth in global trade also means growth in production and consumption, which means that more of the planet's natural resources are being converted into products and services at a faster rate. Globalization has

brought instant worldwide communications and impressive flows of private capital.

We are truly en route to a global society. This is all the more reason then that it is both critical and urgent that we establish a basis of cooperation on the environmental front that is equal to on the basis of competition that currently prevails on the economic front, for if Governments are to have any hope of arresting the impoverishment of their people and their environments, it will be by working together multilaterally.

The only thing that can bring about this type of change is the establishment of means by which a level playing field can be secured among countries behaving in environmentally sensible ways. For every inch that intensive global competition drives environmental standards down, intensive global collaboration must build them back up again.

Environment as a preoccupation in the political affairs of the planet must be elevated in the global scheme of things. The United Nations Environment Programme must become the credible, authoritative, influential and politically relevant global voice for the environment. To do so, it must assume a stature on a par with the voices of trade and finance, equipped and empowered to meet the threats to the health of the planet head on.

As UNEP marks 25 years of achievement, the need for a stronger, more powerful organization has been underscored in public opinion research, by Environment Ministers in the Nairobi Declaration, by civil society at Rio + 5 and at the Commission on Sustainable Development + 5.

I am here to tell you that UNEP will not retreat from this challenge. With confidence we are building for the future. The UNEP of the twenty-first century will bring coherence to an increasingly fragmented system of environmental laws and secretariats. The UNEP of the twenty-first century will work with countries to put in place agreements and arrangements with teeth, that are enforceable. For we all agree that there must be no advantage to inaction and non-compliance and no disadvantage to honouring commitments.

The UNEP of the twenty-first century will build on its competencies, its analytical capability and its facilitating and catalytic role. Already, UNEP's work in such important areas as state of environment reporting, environmental law, sustainable production and consumption, trade and environment and environmental technology reflect its new orientation to deal with the realities of globalization.

But to be all that Governments want it to be, the UNEP of the twenty-first century also needs the kind of financial support and commitment that is given to counterpart economic institutions. It needs the kind of political ownership and vitality that I am confident is now being generated with the creation of the new High-level Committee of ministers and officials.

Will this week be a defining moment for the environment? So many seem preoccupied with sketching a grand vision and agenda for the twenty-first century. But, I think, if we have failed, it is perhaps because we have not been bold enough in our actions, not in our dreams. Perhaps bureaucracy has blunted our focus of vision and effectiveness. As we prepare to enter the next century, let us just very simply commit ourselves to tending first to the unfinished business of this century. To this task UNEP rededicates itself.

**The Acting President** (*interpretation from Spanish*): I thank the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme for her statement.

*Ms. Elizabeth Dowdeswell, Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The Acting President** (*interpretation from Spanish*): The next speaker on the list is Mr. Thilo Bode, Executive Director of Greenpeace International, speaking on behalf of the Non-Governmental Organizations' Major Group.

*Mr. Thilo Bode, Executive Director of Greenpeace International, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Mr. Bode** (Greenpeace International): Greenpeace appreciates the opportunity and honour to address the world's sovereign Governments on behalf of millions of people worldwide. We acknowledge the compliment to us and to the many other non-governmental organizations which have drawn attention to the problems facing our planet and the solutions to them.

But it is with some sadness that I stand before you. My presence here is a testament to the fact that, despite the alarm which has been raised, you have failed as yet to act. You have given in to commercial interests; you

have put national interests above the welfare of future generations.

The *Global Environmental Outlook* published by the United Nations Environment Programme clearly states that the use of renewable resources — land, forest, fresh water, coastal areas, fisheries and urban air — is beyond their natural regeneration capacity and therefore is unsustainable.

"Business as usual" is no longer an option. Whatever the promises representatives made at Rio, the condition of the world has worsened, in many cases at a faster rate than five years ago. Glaciers are melting; forests are retreating; we are changing the seasons; we are running out of fish in the sea; we are poisoning our children with persistent organic pollutants; and we are accumulating nuclear waste to the peril of future generations. And as carbon emissions increase, we find ourselves running out of sky.

The vast majority of nations have committed, in the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, to preventing dangerous interference with the climate system. Yet outside this building, there is another reality. Carbon dioxide emissions have increased to unprecedented levels. Sea levels will rise so much that entire nations represented in this Hall may vanish. The frequency of extreme weather events, such as storms, which cause billions of dollars of damage, has increased.

Industrialized countries must commit to cutting their carbon dioxide emissions by one fifth of the 1990 levels by 2005. Unless these countries, like the United States — which consumes twice as much energy per capita as the rest of the industrialized world — take the first bold steps, they will have failed to provide real leadership. The fate of this planet will be determined by the bravery or cowardice of their response to the challenge of global climate change at the Conference in Kyoto.

We call upon all Governments to agree that this meeting marks the beginning of the phase-out of fossil fuels and their replacement by renewable energy. More than three-quarters of the known reserves of oil, coal and gas must remain in the ground if we are to avoid catastrophic climate disruption. Why, then, do the Governments of Great Britain, the United States and others which have called at this session for the reduction of $CO_2$ emissions continue to subsidize or permit the search for new oil in pristine areas, such as the Atlantic and Alaska? Clean, renewable energy exists in abundance. Nuclear power is not an alternative.

The United Nations created a magnificent treaty in Rio: the Convention on Biological Diversity. But the host of plants and animals that depend on forests cannot live in a treaty, however many annexes it may acquire. And as we sit here today, clear-cut logging is under way in the last great stands of northern rainforests on the Pacific Coast of Canada and the United States of America. Yet how can we ask Brazil to stop the illegal logging and clearing in Amazonia when two of the world's wealthiest nations, Canada and the United States, are, as I speak, logging their last remaining rainforests into extinction?

If the Assembly is serious about protecting species, it must halt all destruction of remaining old growth and primary rainforests, wherever they are found. Every species we lose, we lose forever.

The abolition of slavery, decolonization and the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights were defining points in human history, moments in which people and then nations took deliberate steps toward true humanity. Today we are at such a threshold again.

Progress in protecting our environment will take more money. But money is not enough. Industrialized countries cannot simply wash their hands of responsibility by making investments in the developing world. Nor can the developing world use the global environmental crisis solely as leverage for obtaining finance. The world deserves effective programmes and binding commitments. But countries like Germany that subsidize fossil fuel industries with billions of dollars while at the same time proposing a new environmental bureaucracy lack credibility when real leadership by industrialized countries is needed.

There are numerous other important issues, but time does not allow me to address them. I would, however, urge Government delegations seriously to consider non-governmental organization documents, in particular the recommendations for actions and commitments at Earth Summit II, which addresses 40 to 50 important sectoral and cross-cutting issues.

It has become fashionable to say that Governments can do very little and that all power now lies with unaccountable multinational companies and institutions in a newly globalized market. But let that not disguise the power and accountability which you, together, hold to impose environmental and social limits, controls and standards.

The measure of success or failure in the efforts to save the world will not be words. The sole measure of success will be the actions these words become.

**The Acting President** (*interpretation from Spanish*): I thank the Executive Director of Greenpeace International for his statement.

*Mr. Thilo Bode, Executive Director of Greenpeace International, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The Acting President** (*interpretation from Spanish*): We have heard the last speaker in the debate for this meeting.

I now call on the representative of Rwanda, who wishes to speak in exercise of the right of reply.

May I remind members that, in accordance with General Assembly decision 34/401, statements in exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and to five minutes for the second intervention and should be made by delegations from their seats.

**Mr. Habiyaremye** (Rwanda) (*interpretation from French*): My statement will be very brief, because it is more of a clarification than a right of reply as such. I am taking the floor in connection with the statement made by Ms. Joji Carino of the International Alliance of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples of the Tropical Forests, which she described as an intercontinental network that includes the Batwa people of Rwanda.

The delegation of Rwanda would like to say that the Batwa people are an integral part of the Rwandan people, the Banyarwanda, who since time immemorial have been united by single language, a single culture and, more important, similar lifestyles. The Government of Rwanda, represented here, is speaking on behalf of the entire people of Rwanda, united and indivisible.

Environmental problems such as deforestation, of which we all are aware, do not affect only one segment of the people of Rwanda. These days, there are no Banyarwanda people living in the forest. We support all appeals in favour of the conservation of forests, but we believe that those who are familiar with Rwanda know that today none of its people live in the forests, which are giving way to towns and to arable land, as is the case everywhere else.

*The meeting rose at 6.35 p.m.*